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JD(U), RJD, YSRCP, BJD demand spl status for states

Congress seeks LS deputy Speaker's post at all-party meet

NEW DELHI, 21 JULY

Ahead of the Budget session of Parliament, JD(U), YSRCP and BJD on Sunday demanded special category status for Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha respectively, while Congress's Jairam Ramesh said "strangely, the TDP kept quiet on the matter" in the all-party meeting convened by the government ahead of Parliament session. Congress sought the Lok Sabha Deputy Speaker's position for the Opposition.

The demand for special category status for Bihar during an all-party meeting came from the ruling NDA as well as the INDIA Opposition bloc, with BJP allies -- Sanjay Kumar Jha of the Janata Dal (United) and Union minister Chirag Paswan of the Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) -- also batting for it. The Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) also joined the chorus.

Congress MPs Gaurav Gogoi, Jairam Ramesh and Pramod Tiwari, AAP MP Sanjay Singh, YSRCP MP Vijayasai Reddy in New Delhi on Sunday ***PHOTO: PTI***

Jha, however, said a special financial package can also be an option if a special status is not possible.

Ramesh said JD(U) and YSRCP demanded special category status for Bihar and Andhra Pradesh respectively but "strangely", the ruling Telugu Desam Party (TDP) kept quiet on the matter.

On X, he said, "How the political climate has changed! In the all-party meeting of floor leaders, the BJD leader reminded the Defence Minister and BJP President JP Nadda that BJP's manifesto for the 2014 Assembly elections in Odisha had promised special category status to the state." Biju Janata Dal (BJD) leader Sasmit Patra told reporters that his party demanded special category status for Odisha.

- Jairam Ramesh said "strangely", the ruling Telugu Desam Party (TDP) in Andhra Pradesh kept quiet on the special status matter

"Odisha has been deprived of the special category status for more than two decades. The BJD has been demanding it for a long time. Parties from Bihar and Andhra Pradesh have also demanded it and the Centre must revisit the issue with such demands coming from various states," he said.

Asked about the YSRCP's allegation that it is ignoring the special category status issue TDP MP Lavu Sri Krishna Devarayalu said, "We are clear. We will definitely use this opportunity to raise all the issues important for Andhra Pradesh." *—PTI*

14-YEAR-OLD BOY INFECTED WITH NIPAH VIRUS DIES IN KERALA

KOZHIKODE, 21 JULY

The 14-year-old boy from Kerala's Malappuram, who was under treatment here for Nipah infection, died on Sunday, state Health Minister Veena George said.

George said the boy from Pandikkad suffered a massive cardiac arrest at 10.50 am on Sunday and efforts to revive him failed.

"He was on a ventilator and was not conscious. The urine output had reduced this morning. After the massive cardiac arrest, the revival efforts failed and he passed away at 11.30 am," George said.

The Minister said the funeral will be held following

PHOTO: PTI

international protocols.

The Minister said currently there are three people under isolation at Kozhikode medical college where the deceased boy was undergoing treatment.

The Minister had informed that there are a total of 246 people in the contact list of the boy out of which 63 were under high-risk category.

The Health department has also decided to conduct fever surveillance in two panchayats and a total of around 33,000 houses will be covered under it. Meanwhile, Centre will deploy a multi-member joint outbreak response team to support Kerala in investigating a Nipah virus case detected in its Mallapuram district, identifying epidemiological linkages and providing technical assistance.

The ministry has advised the state to implement public health measures such as active case search in the boy's family and his neighbourhood, and in areas with similar topography of the place the case was detected. *—PTI*

Man shot dead in Manipur's Imphal East

IMPHAL, 21 JULY

A man was shot dead in Manipur's Imphal East district, police said on Sunday. The incident happened at Tekcham in Lamlain police station area on Saturday, they said. The man, RK Prithibi Singh, was blindfolded, his hands were tied behind his back and shot from a point-blank range, they added. A proscribed outfit, KCP (Progressive), claimed responsibility for the execution-style murder, stating that Singh was spying for security forces. It claimed that Singh was a former militant who teamed up with other surrendered militants to spy for the forces. Meanwhile, a militant of the proscribed KCP (Taibanganba) was arrested from Tejpur Makha Leikai in Kakching district, police said. *—PTI*

B'desh SC scraps job quotas after deadly unrest

DHAKA, 21 JULY

Bangladesh's top court on Sunday scaled back a controversial quota system for government job applicants, after days of unrest and clashes between police and demonstrators that have killed hundreds of people. Students, frustrated by shortages of good jobs, have been demanding an end to a quota that reserved 30 per cent of government jobs for relatives of veterans who fought in Bangladesh's war of independence in 1971. Ruling on an appeal, the Supreme Court ordered that the veterans' quota be cut to 5 per cent , with 93 per cent of jobs to be allocated on merit. *—PTI*

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MUMBAI RAINS

Policemen push a vehicle stuck on a waterlogged road during monsoon rain, at Parel in Mumbai, on Sunday. Mumbai and its suburbs received over 100 mm of rainfall in ten hours till Sunday evening ***PHOTO: PTI***

ON ALERT

Haryana suspends internet for 24 hrs ahead of Nuh yatra

Two home guards were killed last year as a mob in Haryana's Nuh district tried to stop a Vishva Hindu Parishad procession ***PHOTO: PTI***

CHANDIGARH, 21 JULY

Haryana government on Sunday ordered suspension of mobile internet and the bulk SMS services in Nuh district for 24 hours ahead of the Braj Mandal Jalabhishek Yatra that was marred by violence last year.

Two home guards were killed and at least 15 others, including several policemen, injured on 31 July last year as a mob in Haryana's Nuh district tried to stop a Vishva Hindu Parishad procession, pelting stones and setting cars on fire.

However, Nuh Deputy Commissioner Dhirendra Khadgata said security has been stepped in the district to ensure that the event takes place peacefully.

"Situation is very peaceful, cordial ahead of the Yatra and both communities (Hindus and Muslims) are ready to welcome it," Khadgata said. The internet service in the district will remain suspended from 6pm Sunday to 6pm on Monday, according to an order by Haryana Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Anurag Rastogi.

The suspension came "to stop the spread of misinformation and rumours" through social media platforms, such as WhatsApp, Facebook, X. Many welcome gates have been erected and food stalls set up for the members of the procession, he said.

Authorities said drones will be deployed on the route of the yatra, which will start from Nuh's Nalhar temple and end in Singar going via Jhir temple. At least six people, including a cleric who was attacked in a mosque in Gurugram, were killed and scores injured in the immediate aftermath of the interfaith clash.

BJP government in the state, then led by Manohar Khattar, had drawn sharp criticism from the Opposition parties over the violence. *—PTI*

Nepal PM Oli wins vote of confidence in Parliament

KATHMANDU, 21 JULY

Nepal Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli won a crucial floor test in Parliament on Sunday with more than two-thirds of lawmakers voting in his favour, nearly a week after he was sworn in to lead a coalition government in the politically unstable Himalayan nation.

Oli secured 188 votes in favour of the Vote of Confidence motion tabled by him while 74 votes were cast against him. Out of a total of 263 members of the House of Representatives who were present, one member abstained. Oli, 72, required 138 votes to pass the floor test in the lower house of Parliament.

"I declare that the motion of the vote of confidence tabled by Oli has been endorsed with a majority," announced Speaker Devraj Ghimire after the counting of votes. According to Nepal's Constitution, Oli needed to secure a vote of confidence from Parliament within 30 days of appointment. He was sworn in on Monday as Nepal's Prime Minister for a fourth time.

Earlier while tabling the motion seeking a vote of confidence in his government, Oli made public the content of the seven-point agreement reached between the Nepali Congress and the CPN-UML earlier this month. Oli said that the agreement was part of the two largest parties' efforts to address the country's pressing issues. *—PTI*

PhonePe CEO apologises for comments on job bill

NEW DELHI, 21 JULY

Amid a furore over his comments on the now-stalled Karnataka job quota bill, PhonePe CEO and Founder Sameer Nigam on Sunday offered an "unconditional apology" and said he never intended to insult the state and its people.

The move assumes significance as PhonePe drew criticism and boycott calls on social media after Nigam had slammed the now-suspended Karnataka government's quota-for-jobs bill, that had originally proposed reservation for locals in private sector.

Issuing a personal statement on Sunday, Nigam said PhonePe was born in Bengaluru and the team is incredibly proud of its roots in this city, which is well known for its world-class technology talent and vibrant diversity.

"I read some recent media articles, relating to a few personal comments that I made last week regarding the draft job reservation bill. I would

Sameer Nigam ***PHOTO: X/@_SAMEERNIGAM***

first and foremost like to clarify that it was NEVER my intention to insult Karnataka and its people," Nigam said.

He added, "If my comments hurt anyone's sentiments in such a way, I am truly sorry and would like to offer you an unconditional apology."

Nigam said he has highest regards for Kannada, and all other Indian languages, and truly believes that linguistic diversity and rich cultural heritage is a national asset that all Indians should be proud of.

Bengaluru's reputation as the 'Silicon valley of India' is truly well-deserved, he said. *—PTI*

NCERT BOOK REVISION

Harappan society is now 'Sindhu-Sarasvati'

NEW DELHI, 21 JULY

India had a prime meridian of its own much ahead of the Greenwich meridian and it was called "madhya rekha", which passed through the city of Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh, according to a new Class-6 NCERT textbook for social science.

No mention of caste-based discrimination, tweaks in references to BR Ambedkar's experience about the discrimination, referring to the Harappan civilisation as "Sindhu-Sarasvati" are also among the changes in the textbook developed according to a new curriculum.

In a departure from the past, the textbook makes multiple references to the "Sarasvati" river in the chapter pertaining to the beginning of the Indian civilisation.

The references were also tweaked in the Covid-19 rationalisation, which was earlier termed temporary to reduce burden ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

In the new textbook, the river finds a prominent place in a chapter on the "Beginnings of Indian Civilisation", where the Harappan civilisation is referred to as the "Indus-Sarasvati" or "Sindhu-Sarasvati" civilisation. It says the "Sarasvati" basin included major cities of the civilisation -- Rakhigarhi and Ganweriwala -- along with smaller cities and towns.

According to the new book, "Many professions are mentioned in the vedic texts, such as agriculturist, weaver, potter, builder, carpenter, healer, dancer, barber, priest, etc."

The references were also tweaked in the Covid-19 rationalisation, which was earlier termed temporary by the NCERT to reduce burden.

What has been culled drastically is the detailed exploration of the kingdoms of ancient India, such as those contained in four chapters of the old book that have been deleted from the new. This includes accounts of the kingdoms of Ashoka and Chandragupta Maurya, including the role of Chanakya and his Arthashastra as well as the dynasties of the Guptas, Pallavas and Chalukyas, and the work of Kalidasa. *—PTI*

3 dead in Kedarnath landslide, 8 hurt

RUDRAPRAYAG, 21 JULY

Three devotees died and eight others got injured in a landslide on the Kedarnath Dham trekking route in Uttarakhand's Rudraprayag district on Sunday, officials said.

Rudraprayag District Disaster Management Officer Nandan Singh Rajwar said the accident happened at around 7.30am near Chirbasa area on the Gaurikund-Kedarnath trekking route when the devotees were hit heavy stones and debris falling down from the hill.

The State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) and disaster management teams reached the spot and started a search and rescue operation, he said. Those killed were Kishore Arun Parate, 31, from Maharashtra's Nagpur, Sunil Mahadev Kale, 24, a resident of Maharashtra's Jalna district and Anurag Bisht from Rudraprayag, Rajwar said.

SDRF personnel conduct a rescue operation following a landslide on the Kedarnath trekking route, in Rudraprayag district, on Sunday ***PHOTO: PTI***

According to SDRF sources, so far the bodies of three devotees have been recovered from the debris, while eight others were rescued in an injured condition and immediately rushed to the hospital. The rescue operation is still underway, they said. Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami has expressed grief over the loss of lives in the accident.

In a post on X, Dhami said, "Relief and rescue work is going on at the site of the accident. I am constantly in touch with the officials in this regard. Instructions have been given to provide better treatment to those injured in the accident." *—PTI*

PHOTO: INDIA TV

Baby boy born with 25 fingers in Bagalkot

BENGALURU, 21 JULY

In a rare medical condition, a newborn baby boy was born with a total of 25 fingers and toes, surprising both the medical professionals and the family members in Bagalkot district, Karnataka. This rare case occurred at Sunshine Hospital in Rabkavi Banhatti town, where doctors discovered the newborn had 12 toes (six on each foot) and 13 fingers (six on his right hand and seven on his left). The baby Bharti's father, Gurappa, shared in an interview that his wife regularly visited the Sri Bhuvaneshwari Devi Shakti Peetam Suragiri Hills temple in Kundaragi, praying for a child. However, both mother and child are in good health. Polydactyly, a condition where individuals are born with extra fingers or toes can occur due to genetic mutations or spontaneously without any genetic cause. *—Salar News*

Govt introduces system to curb plastic pollution

Tourists must dispose of plastic items in vehicles before entering forests

BENGALURU, 21 JULY

In a decisive move to protect forest areas from pollution, the State government has instructed the forest department to implement a two-stage system to prevent the use of single-use plastic products in forest areas. This directive addresses the increasing issue of plastic waste harming wildlife and the environment.

Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre announced the initiative, which will take effect within the next seven days.

In the first phase, passengers must voluntarily dispose of single-use plastic items in their vehicles before entering the forest areas. Dustbins will be provided for this purpose.

In the second phase, officials are asked to conduct thorough checks on vehicles near toll booths at forest entrances. Vehicles found carrying plastic bottles, liquor bottles, or other single-use plastic items will have these items seized immediately.

Additionally, fines will be imposed on passengers found with such items.

Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre announced the initiative, which will take effect within the next seven days PHOTO: EARTH.ORG

This situation is notably critical in protected areas such as Nagarhole and Bandipur, where dedicated personnel and vehicles are already tasked with collecting plastic waste.

Addressing reporters on Sunday, Khandre stated, "The presence of plastic materials in wildlife-dominated forest areas is always a threat. This is not only concerning but also leads to disaster. Hence, all vehicles entering the forest areas shall be thoroughly checked at two stages for plastic materials."

- This situation is notably critical in protected areas such as Nagarhole and Bandipur, where dedicated personnel and vehicles are already tasked with collecting plastic waste

Khandre highlighted the severe consequences of plastic pollution, citing recent incidents where 3-4 kg of plastic was recovered from the stomach of a crocodile, with similar cases reported across various forest areas.

He has instructed the Deputy Chief Secretary of the Forest Department to take immediate action to prevent single-use plastic products from being carried into forest areas.

—Salar News

B'luru among worst to spend on clean air

BENGALURU, 21 JULY

According to Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), Karnataka is among the three worst-performing states in utilising funds allocated for air quality improvement under the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP). Among 131 cities, Bengaluru ranks the lowest, having used just 13 per cent of the allocated funds over the last four years.

According to the State pollution control board, some of the most air-polluted areas in the City include KR Circle, Hebbal Junction, Silk Board Junction, Trinity Circle, Jalahalli Cross, and Yeshwanthpur Junction, with Air Quality Index (AQI) levels reaching 300, 400, and sometimes even 500, categorizing these areas as very unhealthy to hazardous zones. The city's residents are increasingly at risk from diseases linked to poor air quality, including respiratory and cardiovascular conditions.

Other cities in Karnataka, including Davanagere, Gulbarga, and Hubballi-Dharwad, also struggled with fund utilisation.

Speaking to Salar News, Ravi Kumar, an environmental activist with the Save Green NGO, said, "In a City like Bengaluru, the air quality issues stem from multiple sources, including vehicular emissions, construction dust, and industrial activities. The current focus on road dust alone is not sufficient." Efforts to curb industrial pollution received only 0.61 per cent of the funds, while reducing vehicular pollution accounted for 12.63 per cent, and addressing biomass burning received 14.51 per cent.

Paramesh Naik, an assistant professor in the Department of Environmental Science at Bengaluru University, Jnanabharathi, told Salar News, "There's a dire need for the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board to reassess its strategies and ensure a more effective implementation of the NCAP funds.'—*Salar News*

R Ashoka PHOTO: SALAR

Oppn targets govt over relief to those affected due to rains

HASSAN, 21 JULY

Opposition BJP and JD(S) in Karnataka on Sunday targeted the Siddaramaiah-led Congress government, accusing it of having failed to provide immediate relief to those affected by flooding and landslides in several parts of the State, due to heavy monsoon showers.

Leader of Opposition in Assembly R Ashoka of BJP and Union Minister and JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswamy today together visited rain and landslide affected areas in the districts, especially along the National Highway near Sakleshpur.

While Ashoka claimed that the government was "dead" and too busy with scams to respond to the needs of the people, Kumaraswamy questioned the Chief Minister and his cabinet colleagues not visiting the affected areas so far.

Monsoon rains in Karnataka since June has been 22 per cent above normal and have caused flooding and landslides, especially in coastal and malnad districts of the State.

He urged the current government to continue with the relief given by the previous administration, "in fact more should be given considering price raise and other factors."

Hitting out at Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar's reported statement about Kumaraswamy's visit to affected regions -- stating that it is of now use, Ashoka said, "let him come first, he doesn't come, and makes negative comments about Union Minister's visit...relief is being given by the Centre, Kumaraswamy has every right to visit, we are in a federal system."

Shivakumar seems to be suggesting that Kumaraswamy should not come to the State, he said, "maybe, his hands and legs tremble if I come. *—PTI*

No negligence in rescue ops: CM after visiting flood-hit area

ANKOLA, 21 JULY

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Sunday inspected the rescue operations on National Highway 66 near Shirur here where a massive landslide took place last week, and instructed officials and the rescue teams to hasten the work, as heavy rains are pounding the region.

Asserting that there has been no negligence or delay by his government in conducting the rescue, he said military personnel have joined the efforts. He said he had also ordered that the families of those who died in the landslide be given Rs 5 lakh compensation.

"Due to a land slide on NH 66 on 16 July, about 10 people were missing. Out of them, seven bodies have been recovered, three are still missing. 44 personnel from State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) and 24 from National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) are a part of the rescue operation," he said. The Army and Navy have been requested to scan the river.

Siddaramaiah PHOTO: PTI

He said 44 personnel from the military have also joined today, while the Navy has been assisting in the operations from day one. He said he was unable to visit the spot earlier as Assembly is in session.

Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda, Uttara Kannada District In-charge Minister Mankal S Vaidya, legislators from the district and senior officials, among others, were present during the chief minister's visit and inspection.

The compensation of Rs 5 lakh to the families of each deceased has been given, Siddaramaiah added. "In case more bodies are recovered, the families will also be given Rs 5 lakh compensation," he said.

When reporters pointed out to the Chief Minister about the possible landslides spots, and asked why no action was taken, Siddaramaiah said in the one year there were no rains due to drought last year. *—PTI*

PREVENTING DENGUE

Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike personnel fumigate at Cubbon Park due to an increase in dengue cases, on Sunday PHOTO: SALAR

Hope no bias against State in budget: Minister

BENGALURU, 21 JULY

Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao said he hoped there would be no discrimination against the State in the Union Budget as it is is one of the biggest financial contributors to the Centre.

Rao was responding to a question on expectations from the upcoming Union Budget on Sunday and said, "We thought they would at least change the attitude. Looks like they are going on in the same manner... Our wish is that the Union government realizes that Karnataka is one of the biggest contributors to the Central government. We are the second in contributions in GST and FDI. If they do discriminatory budgets like they have done earlier, it is going to affect them only.

"Hopefully, this time they would be fair and not try to promote only the BJP-ruled States and see that equitable distribution of funds takes place...," he added.

Apart from that, a meeting of the Central government with floor leaders of all political parties was held under the Chairmanship of Union Minister of Defence Rajnath Singh on Sunday, before the commencement of the Budget Session of Parliament.

Dinesh Gundu Rao PHOTO: X

- Union Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, Kiren Rijiju informed that the Budget Session of Parliament will commence on 22 July and the session may conclude on 12 August

Union Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, Kiren Rijiju informed that the Budget Session of Parliament will commence on 22 July and subject to exigencies of government business, the session may conclude on 12 August.

—ANI

HC quashes POCSO case as man marries victim

BENGALURU, 21 JULY

The High Court has quashed criminal proceedings against a 23-year-old man from Mysuru, who had allegedly sexually assaulted a 18-year-old when she was a minor, following their marriage and production of their marriage certificate.

Justice M Nagaprasanna emphasised that the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) case could be revived if the accused abandons the girl and their child after the case's closure.

The court had earlier granted interim bail to the accused to facilitate the marriage with the victim (after she attained the age of 18), requiring him to return to jail with the marriage certificate. The accused complied with it.

The court has ruled that continuing the proceedings would negatively impact the mother and child, leading to societal stigma.

The incident occurred on 2 February, 2023 when the accused took the school-going girl to an isolated location and allegedly sexually assaulted her.

The girl subsequently gave birth to their child. Both parties' -- accused and the victim -- through their legal representatives submitted that they were in love, but faced parental opposition.

They had sought closure of the proceedings, considering the accused's wish to marry the victim.

The court's decision was also influenced by a DNA report confirming the biological parentage of the child. *—PTI*

ON A SACRED DAY

Devotees offer pooja on the occasion of Gurupoornima at Kohinoor Ground in Bengaluru on Sunday PHOTO: SALAR

PLEA FILED IN SC SEEKING ARMY'S HELP ON NH-66

BENGALURU, 21 JULY

A Public Interest Litigation (PIL) has been submitted to the Supreme Court requesting the deployment of Indian Army personnel for rescue efforts on National Highway 66 in Uttara Kannada. The landslide, which occurred on 16 July due to heavy rainfall, has reportedly exposed the inadequacies of the State's government's emergency response.

Advocate Subhash Chandran KR, who filed the PIL, criticised the State authorities for their insufficient action during the critical initial hours following the disaster. The petition asserts that the State lacks a comprehensive action plan to manage such hazardous situations and calls for the implementation of a Landslide Management Plan in vulnerable districts.

One particular case highlighted is that of Arjun, a truck driver from Kerala, who has been trapped at the landslide site. Chandran pointed out that GPS signals from Arjun's phone were detectable for the first few days, suggesting that his location could have been identified and rescue efforts more effectively directed. "It is heart-breaking that after six days, he remains unrecovered, reflecting the State's negligence," the petition notes. It also mentioned that despite the proximity of an army cantonment in Belagavi and naval resources in Karwar, State did not mobilize these assets. *—Salar News*

Gig workers' bill: IFAT supports govt's initiatives

BENGALURU, 28 JUNE

The Indian Federation of App-based Transport Workers (IFAT) has put forward recommendations supporting the Karnataka government's initiative to pass a new law for the welfare of platform-based gig workers.

The Karnataka Platform-based Gig Workers Bill, 2024, proposes social security benefits. It introduces safeguards against unfair dismissals, a two-level grievance redressal mechanism, and more transparency regarding automated monitoring systems. IFAT emphasised that the rights of gig workers should be clearly defined within the law itself, with specific details to be addressed in the subsequent rules. IFAT highlighted is that the gig workers should not be harmed by the random decisions made by the algorithms. A 2022 NITI Aayog report estimates India will have 23.5 million gig workers by 2029-30, and Bengaluru alone has 2 lakh gig workers currently working with platforms like Swiggy, Zomato, Uber, Ola and many more. The legislation aims to establish a board for gig workers' welfare and levy a fee to fund social security initiatives. The draft bill aims to define a gig worker as "a person who performs work or participates in a work arrangement that results in a given rate of payment, based on some conditions laid down in a contract and whose work is sourced through a platform." *—Salar News*

FOR IT SECTOR

Govt faces backlash over 14-hour workday

BENGALURU, 21 JULY

New bill would allow a 14-hour workday for employees in companies with a turnover exceeding Rs 20,000 crore PHOTO: PTI

Karnataka State IT/ITES Employees' Union (KITU) has strongly opposed the State government's proposal to amend the Karnataka Shops and Commercial Establishments Act, 1961, to extend the working day for IT, ITES, and BPO sector employees to 14 hours. The union, representing over 10,000 members, has condemned the move as "inhumane" and an "attempt to impose slavery."

However, Labour Minister Santosh S Lad confirmed to Salar News that there will be another round of discussions before final decision is made.

The union said that, the proposed amendment seeks to alter the current law, which limits work to 10 hours a day, including overtime. The new bill would allow a 14-hour workday for employees in companies with a turnover exceeding Rs 20,000 crore. It would also permit employees to work beyond 12 hours a day, provided they do not exceed 125 hours in any three consecutive months.

This amendment will allow the companies to go for a two shift system instead of the currently existing three shift system, and one third of the workforce will be thrown out of their employment, it claimed.

This amendment shows that the Government of Karnataka is not ready to consider the workers as human beings who need personal and social life to survive. Instead, it considers them as only a machinery to increase the profit of the corporates to whom it serves.

KITU General Secretary Suhas Adiga criticised the proposed changes, calling them an "open challenge" to the 2 million IT/ITES sector employees in the State.

—Salar News with Agencies

PM inaugurates World Heritage Committee session

NEW DELHI, 21 JULY

Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurates the 46th session of the World Heritage Committee on Sunday, a key event of the UNESCO that India is hosting for the first time from 21-31 July. Director General of UNESCO Audrey Azoulay will also attend the inaugural event at Bharat Mandapam, the Prime Minister's Office said. Prime Minister Modi will address the gathering on the occasion. The meeting will be attended by more than 2,000 delegates from over 150 countries. During the session spread over 11 days, proposals for nominating new sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List, state of conservation reports of 124 existing world heritage properties, international assistance and utilisation of World Heritage Fund, others, will be discussed.—*PTI*

Kharge dissolves Odisha Congress Committee

NEW DELHI, 21 JULY

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Sunday dissolved the Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee, days after the party's poor showing in the Lok Sabha and assembly polls in the State. Kharge has approved the proposal of complete dissolution of the Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee, including its President, PCC, office bearers and executive committee, District/Block/Mandal Congress Committees, Frontal Organisations, Departments and Cells, with immediate effect, a statement issued by the party said. "The current DCC presidents will serve as acting presidents until new DCC Presidents are appointed," the statement said. Sarat Pattanayak was the president of the now dissolved Odisha PCC.—*PTI*

Rahul Gandhi to receive Oommen Chandy Award

T'PURAM, 21 JULY

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has been chosen for the first Oommen Chandy Public Servant Award instituted in memory of the party veteran and former Kerala Chief Minister late Oommen Chandy. The Oommen Chandy Foundation announced the award on Sunday, three days after the first death anniversary of the leader. The honour comprises a purse of Rs one lakh and a sculpture designed by renowned artist and filmmaker Nemom Pushparaj. Gandhi was a national leader who had listened to the problems of people and found solutions to them by conducting Bharat Jodo Yatra, a statement said here. An expert jury chaired by Shashi Tharoor, MP, selected the awardee, it added. —*PTI*

PHOTO: SALAR

Scribe Aziz Barni's book 'Hindnama' released in Mumbai

MUMBAI, 21 JULY

Journalist Saeed Hameed released the book 'Hindnama' (Urdu and English), authored by Aziz Barni, at Dr Asadullah Khan English High School and Junior College, Noman Imam Auditorium, Mumbai, under the banner of Urdu Literary Forum organised by Unique Educational Society, on Saturday. Journalist Aziz Barni, Obaid Azam Azmi, Irfan Jafari, Ibrahim Khalil Abidi, Abdullah Masroor, Imtiaz Bastwi, Salim Rashik, Tabish Rampuri, Tafsir Alam, and others participated in the ceremony as guests. In the last part of the programme, writers and Urdu scholars and Urdu speakers expressed their presence through questions on Aziz Barni's journey. Convener of the programme Hussain Sultan and Abdul Rehman Chaudhary welcomed guests. —*Salar News*

Varanasi asks meat shops on Kanwar road to stay shut

Govt says steps taken to ensure no law & order situation arises

Kanwariyas walk past a shop on which banners with shopkeeper's name was put up on after an order issued by UP government PHOTO: PTI

MUZAFFARNAGAR, 21 JULY

Varanasi Municipal Corporation, in an order, has asked all meat and poultry shops on the Kanwar Yatra route to remain closed for the month of Saawan.

The directive came after state governments in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Madhya Pradesh asked shop owners in parts of the state to display their names and phone numbers on the Kanwar Yatra route.

Municipal Commissioner has instructed the concerned officials to ensure that these shops along the Kanwar routes are shut throughout the Sawan month to prevent any inconvenience or issues for the Kanwariyas.

Meanwhile, BJP-ruled Ujjain Municipal Corporation has directed shop owners to display their names and mobile numbers outside their establishments in the ancient city, a directive coming on the heels of a similar order by the BJP government in UP for eateries along the Kanwar Yatra route. Violators will have to pay Rs 2,000 fine for the first offence and Rs 5,000 if they defy this order for the second time, Ujjain Mayor Mukesh Tatwal said on Saturday.

This order is aimed at ensuring safety and transparency and not intended to target Muslim shop-keepers, the mayor said. —*PTI*

Muslim & Hindu owners ask staffers to quit amid fear

MUZAFFARNAGAR, 21 JULY

For the past seven years, Brijesh Pal, a daily wager, would work at a roadside dhaba in Khatauli area of Muzaffarnagar during the two months of Shravan to help his Muslim owner manage the heavy footfall of customers, mainly the Kanwariyas.

Small fruit vendors, and dhabas fear their earnings will be severely hit by the move.

Arsalan, the owner of the dhaba, said he fears that Kanwariyas will not eat at his place due to his Muslim name.

"My dhaba is named Baba ka Dhaba, like every third dhaba on this route. More than half of my staff are Hindus. We serve only vegetarian food here and even avoid using garlic and onion during Shravan (monsoon).

The order has not just impacted the earnings or Muslim owners and their staff but also Muslim staff working in eateries owned by Hindu owners.

A few other 'dhaba' owners also complained about the lack of specific directions in the government order on how the names are to be displayed at their outlets.

> **When Ramdev has no problem in revealing his identity, then why should Rehman have any problem?**
>
> -Ramdev, Yoga guru

People have approached the local administration and even the elected representatives of their area.

Despite mounting criticism the state governments has defended the order, saying it will ensure that no law-and-order situation arises and so that there is no confusion among Kanwariyas.

SC to hear on Monday plea against UP govt order

Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday a plea against the Uttar Pradesh government's order that eateries along the Kanwar Yatra route must display the names of their owners. A bench of justices Hrishikesh Roy and SVN Bhatti is likely to hear the plea filed by NGO Association of Protection of Civil Rights. —*PTI*

In RS, bills barring former judges from politics, deepfake ban listed

NEW DELHI, 21 JULY

Private Members' Bills listed in Rajya Sabha for the upcoming Monsoon Session include one that seeks prohibition on holders of constitutional posts, like judges, joining a political party post retirement, a few bills on artificial intelligence and deepfake, as well as one on amending the citizenship law.

In all, 23 Private Members' Bills have been listed for introduction in the upcoming session in the Upper House.

The Constitution (amendment) Bill, 2024 (amendment of articles 124, 148, 319 and 324 and insertion of new articles 220A and 309A), listed by Rashtriya Janata Dal MP AD Singh, seeks to bar those retiring from Constitutional posts, like judges and former election commissioners from joining political parties post retirement, a source said.

The Bill comes against the backdrop of recent controversies such as one involving Calcutta High Court judge Abhijit Gangopadhyay, who resigned from his judicial position on 5 March, and within two days, joined the Bharatiya Janata Party.

In July, former Madhya Pradesh High Court judge Rohit Arya joined the BJP, three months after his retirement.

Trinamool Congress MP Mausam Noor has also listed two bills, one on protecting rights of employees from Artificial Intelligence, and another seeking criminalisation of 'deepfake'.

Deepfake involves morphing someone's face or other features of their body digitally to make it appear like someone else, typically for malicious purposes.

During the recently concluded Lok Sabha polls, concerns were expressed over the use of deepfake videos to spread misinformation. Union Home Minister Amit Shah was one of its victims. —*PTI*

23 Private Members' Bills have been listed for introduction in the upcoming session in the Upper House PHOTO: ANI

OBC groups to rally for quota rights from Jalna

JALNA, 21 JULY

Several OBC outfits will start 'Jan Aakrosh Yatra' from Jalna in Maharashtra on Monday to protect their quota rights, one of the organisers said.

Addressing a press conference, activist Navnath Waghmare said the march organised by the OBC Protection Committee will tour various areas in Marathwada, Vidarbha and Ahmednagar.

Among the key participants will be OBC activist Laxman Hake, who has been heading a stir opposing granting of OBC status to Marathas as demanded by Manoj Jarange.

Jarange is on a hunger strike since Saturday in Antarwali Sarati seeking Kunbi certificates for Marathas, which will allow them to avail benefits of OBC quota.

"Jarange's demands are unreasonable and unconstitutional. The march is to protect out rights," Waghmare said. —*PTI*

Woman dies after being hit by ex-BRS MLA's car

HYDERABAD, 21 JULY

A woman died after allegedly being hit by ex-BRS MLA T Rajaiah's car in Hanumakonda district of Telangana, police said on Sunday. The incident occurred when the woman was crossing the four-lane road at Madikonda in the district Saturday night, they said. The car was being driven by a driver Rajaiah, who was in the car, got the car stopped after some distance as his presence may lead to any untoward situation. He sent the car involved in the accident to the police station and left in another car, police said. The woman's husband complained to police about the incident and a case of accident was registered. —*PTI*

'Will work tactically to tackle terror in J&K'

JAMMU, 21 JULY

Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi on Saturday assured Jammu and Kashmir Lt Governor Manoj Sinha that the armed forces and security agencies will work with a "synergetic approach" to tackle growing terror activities in the Jammu region, and maintain peace and stability.

The assurance came as they chaired back-to-back high-level joint security review meetings here, amid concern over rising number of terror incidents and cross-border infiltration. The meeting at the Raj Bhawan and the police headquarters were also attended by the director generals of the BSF, CRPF, J&K Police, the heads of intelligence agencies and other senior security officials, the officials said.

General Dwivedi first chaired an over an-hour-long meeting at the police headquarters before almost all the participants moved to the Raj Bhawan for another round of meeting when LG Sinha, who was in Srinagar, returned to Jammu. Sinha chaired the high-level meeting with the Army Chief, various heads of security and law-enforcement agencies and asked them to pro-actively conduct coordinated counterterrorism operations in the Jammu Division.

The Army chief's visit to Jammu, second in less than three weeks after taking charge as the 30th chief of the Indian Army on June 30, comes close on the heels of two terror attacks that left nine army personnel, including a captain, dead in remote forest belts of Machedi in Kathua and Desa forest in Doda on 8 July and 15 July. —*PTI*

BJP conspiring to kill Kejriwal in jail: AAP

NEW DELHI, 21 JULY

Aam Aadmi Party on Sunday accused the BJP of "conspiring to kill" Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in jail and cited his medical report to show that his sugar levels had fallen 26 times between 3 June and 7 July. There was no immediate reaction from BJP.

AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh said the BJP-led Central government and Lt Governor VK Saxena are playing with Kejriwal's life.

"The documents that the jail authorities have legally provided to Kejriwal's lawyer are enough to tell that any untoward incident can happen to him inside the jail any day," he said. Singh stressed a "deep conspiracy" has been hatched to "kill" Kejriwal.

He cited a report in which it was said that Kejriwal is suffering from diabetes, weight loss, weakness, hypoglycaemia.

Arvind Kejriwal PHOTO: PTI

Singh said if a person's sugar level falls below 80 to 70, then they can go into a dangerous state, anything can happen to them and if it is 50 or below 50, then the person can go into a coma, he can die.

The senior AAP leader said on Kejriwal's request, a third report was given.

The Rajya Sabha MP questioned the LG and the jail administration for "repeatedly spreading false news about Kejriwal's health". —*PTI*

HOPES & EXPECTATIONS TABLED

Child rights activists seek increased funding this Budget

NEW DELHI, 21 JULY

Ahead of the Union Budget, child rights activists and organisations have urged the government to put children at the centre of the development discourse and increase funding for their education, healthcare, and protection services.

Child rights activists expressed hope that the government will heed their calls for a child-centric approach, ensuring the nation's youngest citizens receive the resources and protection they need to thrive. Union Budget will be tabled on Tuesday.

Puja Marwaha, CEO of CRY - Child Rights and You, stressed the significance of putting children at the centre of the development discourse.

Marwaha called for increased allocations for health and nutrition programs, such as the Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0, especially for children belonging to the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs).

In the realm of education, Marwaha pointed out to the setbacks caused by the Covid pandemic, which led to increased school dropouts and significant educational loss.

She also advocated for increased investment under Mission Shakti, focusing on components like "Beti Bachao Beti Padhao".

Bhuwan Ribhu, founder of Child Marriage Free India, called for an increase in budgetary allocation to end child marriage and prevent child sexual abuse. —*PTI*

TMC MARTYRS' RALLY

Didi offers shelter to people hit by Bangladesh protest

WB Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee with Samajwadi Party President Akhilesh Yadav during TMC Martyr's Day rally, in Kolkata PHOTO: PTI

KOLKATA, 21 JULY

Lakhs of people from across West Bengal gathered in Kolkata on Sunday to take part in the TMC's mega rally, its first show of strength following the remarkable performance in the Lok Sabha polls.

From the rally, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is expected to outline the party's blueprint at the national level.

Mamata said that in the wake of the escalating violence in Bangladesh, she would keep the doors of her state open for people in distress from the neighbouring country and offer them shelter.

Meanwhile, BJP slammed Mamata for offering shelter to anyone coming in distress from Bangladesh and called it an "evil plan" of the INDIA bloc to settle illegal immigrants from the neighbouring country to Jharkhand to win elections.

BJP co-incharge for West Bengal Amit Malviya also questioned Banerjee's authority to offer shelter to anyone coming from other country, saying immigration and citizenship are exclusively in the Centre's domain, and that states have no locus-standi in such matters.

> **If former West Bengal education minister Partha Chatterjee can be arrested in the school recruitment scam, then why cannot the central agencies arrest Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan in the NEET irregularities.**
>
> -Abhishek Banerjee, TMC leader

TMC supporters from the far-off districts started arriving two days back and were staying at camps set up in various places in the city.

"21 July Martyrs' Day rally holds a special place in our hearts. We dedicate this day to our martyrs. As our party supremo Mamata Banerjee said, this year we will dedicate this rally to our victory in the Lok Sabha polls," a senior TMC leader said.

The rally is organised on this day every year at Esplanade, the heart of Kolkata, in memory of the 13 Congress workers who were allegedly killed in police firing in 1993 during a protest against the then CPI(M)-led Left Front government in the state. —*PTI*

Akhilesh claims NDA at Centre will not last long

KOLKATA, 21 JULY

Samajwadi Party (SP) chief Akhilesh Yadav said on Sunday that the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre would not last long, asserting that "communal forces" may experience temporary success but would ultimately be defeated.

While addressing the mega Martyrs' Day rally of the TMC, Yadav said, "Those who have come to power are guests for just a few days."

"This government at the Centre won't last long and will fall soon. Such communal forces want to be in power at any cost, but those designs won't succeed," he said, without naming the BJP or the NDA.

Samajwadi Party leader asserted that the "communal forces at the Centre" are "hatching conspiracies and trying to destabilise the country".

Samajwadi Party, along with the Congress, had won 43 Lok Sabha seats in Uttar Pradesh. —*PTI*

PLEA IN SC SEEKS STAY ON RE-TEST OF UGC-NET EXAM

NEW DELHI, 21 JULY

A plea has been filed in the Supreme Court against the decision of the Union Education Ministry to cancel the UGC-NET test following inputs that the exam's integrity may have been compromised.

The ministry on 19 June had ordered the cancellation of the UGC-NET exam and handed over the matter to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) for an investigation.

The plea is scheduled to come up for hearing before a bench of Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra.

The plea filed by advocate Ujjawal Gaur has sought direction to immediately stay the proposed re-examination of the UGC-NET exam until the CBI completes its inquiry into the paper leak allegations.

The petitioner submitted that the "unwarranted" cancellation of the exam has caused significant distress, anxiety, and an unnecessary expenditure of resources for the aspirants who have rigorously prepared.

National Eligibility Test (NET) was conducted in pen-and-paper mode this time on a single day -- 18 June -- with a record 11 lakh students registering for the exam.

UGC-NET is a test to determine the eligibility of Indian nationals for the award of junior research fellowship, for appointment as assistant professors and admission to PhD in Indian universities and colleges. —*PTI*

Sikkim mandates tourist vehicles to carry garbage bags

GANGTOK, 21 JULY

All tourist vehicles entering Sikkim will now have to mandatorily carry a large garbage bag, according to an official order. The decision has been taken to ensure community participation towards achieving the goal of environmental sustainability, said the order issued by the Tourism and Civil Aviation Department. It will be the responsibility of the tour operators, travel agencies and vehicle drivers to inform the traveller about the use of garbage bags for waste disposal, it said. Random checks of tourist vehicles would be conducted to ensure compliance and any vehicle found violating the order, will be penalised, it added. Awareness campaigns about cleanliness are being carried out to educate tourists about waste management and environmental sustainability, officials said. Sikkim, which is India's least populated state with over 6 lakh residents, gets more than 20 lakh visitors every year for its picturesque Himalayan destinations, they said. *—PTI*

40 girls of govt hostel fall ill in MP's Barwani

BARWANI, 21 JULY

More than 40 girls staying in a government hostel in Barwani in Madhya Pradesh took ill, after which they were rushed to hospital where 10 were admitted, a health official said on Sunday. The incident took place in Kasturba Kanya Ashram in Niwali on Saturday, district health officer Devyani Aharwal said. "Some 44 girls complained of vomiting, diarrhoea and fever. They were rushed to hospital where 10 were admitted and the rest were discharged after preliminary treatment. Of the 10, five girls have been referred to the district hospital. We are waiting for medical reports to find out why they fell ill," she said. Another official said water and food samples have been collected from the hostel for analysis. *—PTI*

Case filed against Jindal Group CEO over molestation

KOLKATA, 21 JULY

A case was filed against a senior executive of a Jindal Group company for allegedly molesting a female co-passenger on a Kolkata-Abu Dhabi flight, an officer of the Bidhanngar City Police said on Sunday. The FIR was registered on the basis of a complaint lodged by the woman's parents at the Airport police station on the northern outskirts of Kolkata on Saturday, he said. The female passenger, in a series of posts on X, had alleged that the executive showed her some obscene videos by calling them movie clips, triggering an outrage. A case was filed under BNS sections 74 (assault or use of criminal force with intent to outrage modesty) and 75 (uttering words or making gestures or exhibiting any object in any form insulting the modesty of a woman), the officer said. *—PTI*

Kerala woman dies after being given 'wrong' injection

T'PURAM, 21 JULY

A 28 year-old woman, who had fallen unconscious after allegedly being administered a wrong injection by a doctor at a state-run hospital five days ago, died here on Sunday, family sources said. The deceased woman Krishna Thankappan, from nearby Malayinkeezhu, breathed her last at the Government Medical College Hospital here in the morning. Her family had already alleged that medical negligence was the reason for the woman being unconscious for five days. They accused Dr Vinu of Neyyattinkara General Hospital of administering a wrong injection when she had sought treatment there for kidney stones last week. As she fell unconscious and her condition became worse, Krishna was later shifted to the Medical College here, they said. *—PTI*

Maharashtra sees 1,267 farmer suicides since Jan

MUMBAI, 21 JULY

A total of 1,267 farmers have committed suicide in Maharashtra in the first six months of this year, with Amravati division in the state's Vidarbha region accounting for 557 deaths.

As per January to June data in a state government report, Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar division was second with 430 deaths, followed by 137 in Nashik division, 130 in Nagpur division and 13 in Pune division. No death was reported in the coastal Konkan division.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau, in 2022, Maharashtra led with 37.6 per cent of all farmer suicides in the country.

The NCRB said 11,290 persons involved in the farming sector, comprising 5,207 farmers or cultivators and 6,083 agricultural labourers, ended their lives in 2022. This accounted for 6.6 per cent of all suicides in the country, which stood at 1,70,924. In 2021, 10,881 persons involved in farming, comprising 5,318 farmers and 5,563 agricultural labourers, committed suicide, with Maharashtra accounting for 37.3 per cent of these deaths.

As per NCRB data, a total of 1,64,033 persons committed suicide in 2021 and those connected to farming comprised 6.6 per cent. In 2020, a total of 10,677 individuals in the farming sector (5,579 farmers or cultivators and 5,098 agricultural labourers) died by suicide, which was 7 per cent of the 1,53,052 such deaths nationwide. Maharashtra accounted for 37.5 per cent of the deaths in 2020. *—PTI*

'Infertility crisis may alter population dynamics in India'

He said 27.5M married couples are suffering from infertility

NEW DELHI, 21 JULY

Hormonal issues, increasing substance use, and changing lifestyle are leading to an increase in infertility in India, which may irreversibly altar India's population dynamics, potentially leading to an ageing crisis, Dr Ajay Murdia, the man behind India's one of the largest fertility chain, Indira IVF, has said.

Talking to PTI ahead of the World IVF Day on 25 July, Dr Murdia said that India stands at a critical crossroads, facing an unprecedented infertility crisis that threatens not only millions of families but the country's future demographic balance.

"According to some estimates, about 27.5 million married couples are actively trying to conceive and are suffering from infertility. But only about 2,75,000 IVF cycles are performed every year," he said.

According to a National Family Health Survey, the fertility rate is 1.6 in urban India and 2.1 in its rural areas *PHOTO: pixabay*

"This silent epidemic, affecting one in six couples, is rapidly evolving into a national emergency with far-reaching consequences for India's societal structure and economic prospects," Murdia, Founder and Chairman of Indira IVF, said.

According to a National Family Health Survey, the fertility rate is 1.6 in urban India and 2.1 in its rural areas. By 2050, India's total fertility rate (TFR) is projected to dip to 1.29, far below the replacement rate of 2.1.

This means a rapidly depleting working-age population. "This isn't just about individual families, it's a looming demographic catastrophe that threatens India's economic growth and social stability.

Rampant instances of polycystic ovary syndrome, which affects up to 22.5 per cent of women, increasing substance abuse, changing lifestyles, and rising cases of STI are some of the major reasons behind infertility.

According to him, the government must consider infertility a national health priority and invest in IVF infrastructure, especially in rural areas.

Murdia said the demand for IVF is such that there is a need to scale up training programmes for specialists. Bringing IVF under government health schemes and offering subsidised or free IVF are an imperative, he stressed. *—PTI*

SECURITY BEEFED UP

379 students enter India from B'desh through Tripura

AGARTALA, 21 JULY

Altogether 379 students entered India in the last two days from violence-hit Bangladesh through integrated check posts in Tripura, a Border Security Force official said here on Sunday.

Of the total returnees, 365 crossed over the international border on Saturday and four on Friday, he said. The returnees include three Nepalese students.

According to a BSF official, students, who are stranded in Bangladesh's Brahmanbaria and Dhaka, are expected to return on Sunday. Land Ports Authority of India, Agartala, Manager Debasish Nandi told PTI, "Our facilities are open on Sunday for the people, including students, who want to return home. The ICP Agartala remains open till 11 pm to receive the students stranded in Bangladesh."

BSF, Tripura Frontier, Inspector General Patel Piyush Purushottam Das had assured all possible assistance to returnees and spoke to the Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB) officers for cooperation at their end.

120 students from Assam return from Bangladesh

Nearly 120 students hailing from Assam have returned from Bangladesh, which has been rocked by violent protests, over the last few days, a senior official said on Sunday.

Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Ajay Tewari told PTI that the Assam students have so far entered India through Integrated Check Posts at Sutarkandi in Karimganj district and Dawki in Meghalaya.

"Till Saturday night, 76 students who hail from Assam entered from Dawki while another 41 students from Sutarkandi," he said. *—PTI*

Kerala reports 3 deaths, 11 confirmed H1N1 cases

ERNAKULAM, 21 JULY

Ernakulam has reported 11 confirmed and 134 suspected H1NI cases since January 2024.

According to the district medical office press release from Saturday, this year, 134 suspected H1N1 cases and 11 confirmed H1N1 cases have been reported in the Ernakulam district.

The disease has caused three deaths in this period, according to official estimates.

As per the release, if the common cold does not subside within two days and if the fever increases, or if symptoms such as shortness of breath or chest pain are felt, then one should immediately seek specialist treatment at the nearest government hospital.

Delay in seeking treatment can lead to serious illness and even death. The disease is transmitted through the air.

H1N1 is spread to others by the germs that come out of the infected person when the patient sneezes and coughs. The main symptoms of the disease include fever, cough, sore throat, headache, etc. At the onset of the disease, expert treatment should be sought from the nearest government hospital.

Precautions against the diseases include covering your mouth and nose with tissue when sneezing or coughing and washing your hands with soap after going outside. *—ANI*

Vehicles move on a waterlogged road after heavy monsoon rain, at Dadar in Mumbai on Sunday; Villagers repair the embankment breach caused due to floods following rains, in Baksa district of Assam *PHOTOS: PTI*

11 killed in rain-related incidents in UP

LUCKNOW, 21 JULY

Eleven people were killed in rain-related incidents across Uttar Pradesh in a 24-hour period ending Saturday evening, relief department officials said.

According to the relief department, from 6:30 pm on Friday to 6:30 pm on Saturday, five persons drowned and five others were killed after being hit by lightning. One person in Ghazipur district was killed after snake bite.

Uttar Pradesh recorded an average of 7.3 mm rainfall in the 24-hour period. Of the 75 districts, 19 recorded excess rainfall in this time period, with Hamirpur recording a maximum rainfall of 163.2 mm.

In Gujarat, Dwarka recorded the highest rainfall of 148 mm (5.32 inches) in the last 24 hours. Along with this, 53 mm of rain has been recorded in Valsad. Due to heavy rain, the roads of about 10 villages of Ghed Panthak have become waterlogged.

In view of heavy rains in several parts of Maharashtra, including Mumbai and the coastal Konkan region, Chief Minister Eknath Shinde on Sunday asked officials to be on high alert.

The State Disaster Response Force, the local administration, civic bodies, police etc should take regular updates on the weather from the India Meteorological Department and plan accordingly to provide relief to citizens, Shinde said. *—PTI*

HP sees weak monsoon; rain deficit 43% since 1 June

SHIMLA, 21 JULY

Himachal Pradesh has received 43 per cent deficit rain so far as the South-West monsoon which arrived in the state on 27 June remains weak and erratic. The state received 151.6 mm of rain against the normal rainfall of 266.4 mm between 1 June and 21 July, according to the Met department. Despite spells of heavy rain at isolated places, all 12 districts of the state logged a rain deficit, with Shimla recording 24 per cent and tribal Lahaul and Spiti district 74 per cent less rain. *—PTI*

ASSAM FLOOD: 1.30L PEOPLE STILL AFFECTED

GUWAHATI, 21 JULY

The flood situation in Assam improved on Sunday with the number of people reeling under the deluge decreasing to 1.30 lakh in 10 districts, officials said.

The toll in this year's flood, landslide, lightning and storm stands at 113. Two major rivers, including the Brahmaputra, continued to flow above the danger level. A central team, comprising top officials from various ministries, visited the state to assess the damage caused by two waves of floods this year. Over 1.30 lakh people in 23 revenue circles and 423 villages across 10 districts remain affected in the state, the officials said. *—PTI*

HC TO HEAR UMAR KHALID'S BAIL PLEA

NEW DELHI, 21 JULY

Umar Khalid *PHOTO: PTI*

The Delhi High Court will on Monday hear the bail plea of former JNU student Umar Khalid in a Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) case related to the alleged larger conspiracy behind the riots here in February 2020.

The plea, which assails a recent trial court order refusing to grant bail to Khalid, is scheduled to be heard by a bench of Justices Prathiba M Singh and Amit Sharma. Khalid, Sharjeel Imam, and several others have been booked under the anti-terror law UAPA and provisions of the Indian Penal Code for allegedly being the "masterminds" of the February 2020 riots, which had left 53 people dead and over 700 injured. The violence had erupted during the protests against CAA and NRC. Khalid was arrested by Delhi Police in September 2020. Khalid repeatedly mentioned in the court that there is not a single witness statement against him that attracts terrorist charge. *—PTI*

PUNE ROAD RAGE

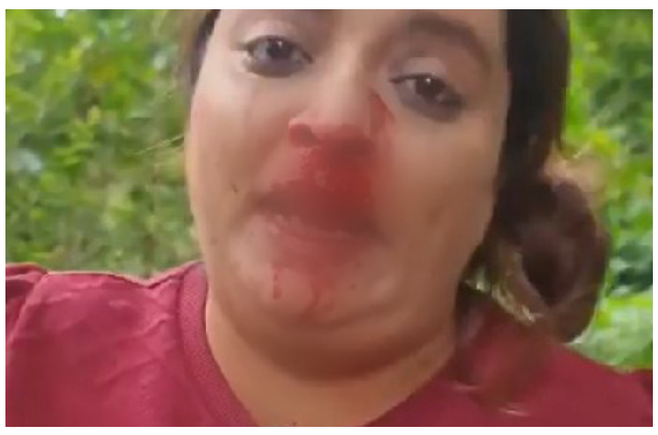
Mother of 2 punched on face by motorist

PUNE, 21 JULY

In an incident of road rage, a woman riding a two-wheeler with two children was punched in the face by a motorist in Pune city after she advised him to drive properly, police said on Sunday.

A case has been registered against the 57-year-old man and his wife for the attack that occurred at Baner-Pashan Link Road on Saturday, an official said.

The victim, Jerlyn Dsilva, a marketing head at a Pune-based luxury hotel, shared a video of the incident on social media, which showed her bleeding profusely from her nose.



The victim Jerlyn Dsilva is a marketing head at a Pune-based luxury hotel *PHOTO: X/ SCREENGRAB*

In another video, Dsilva said she was riding towards Baner on a two-wheeler with two children when a man in a car did not give her way.

"While on my bike with the two kids, the old man driving his car did not let me ride ahead. I told him to drive properly. He then lowered the car window and verbally abused me," she said.

Dsilva claimed that after she managed to pass the car, the driver tailed her, forcing her to stop on the side of the road.

"The man stopped his car, blocking my way, got out angrily, grabbed my shirt, and punched me three to four times in the face," she alleged in the video.

Dsilva claimed that when she attempted to take the car keys to prevent the man from fleeing, his wife, who was in the car, also assaulted her.

Bystanders intervened during the altercation, and Dsilva was taken to a hospital and the police were subsequently informed.

An official from Chatustringi police station said the couple was booked under relevant provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. *—PTI*

Fire on ship off Goa coast under control, search on

PANAJI, 21 JULY

The fire that broke out on 19 July on a merchant navy ship off the coast of Goa is under control and one crew member had died in the blaze, a senior Indian Coast Guard official said on Sunday.

MV Maersk Frankfurt, carrying 1,154 containers, including some with dangerous cargo like benzene and sodium cyanate, had caught fire some 102 nautical miles off the coast of Goa while on its way from Mundra in Gujarat to Colombo in Sri Lanka.

Dry chemical powder that was spread through helicopters on Saturday helped to a large extent in controlling the fire, ICG Deputy Inspector General Manoj Bhatia told PTI.

There is no fire in the portion in which the dangerous cargo is stocked, the ICG deputy inspector general asserted.

PHOTO: PTI

Bhatia said past experience has shown such fires take 3-4 days to be put out completely, and even then the area remains heated, which one needs to keep a watch on.

Bhatia said fire in the part of the ship where the dangerous cargo is stocked could have resulted in a major disaster. *—PTI*

COLOMBIA'S INDEPENDENCE

Military vehicles at the Independence Day military parade, in Bogota, Colombia. Colombia is marking 214 years of independence from Spain ***PHOTO: PTI***

Amid IT outage hackers gain by exploiting tech

Government cybersecurity agencies across the globe and even CrowdStrike CEO George Kurtz are warning businesses and individuals around the world about new phishing schemes that involve malicious actors posing as CrowdStrike employees or other tech specialists ***PHOTO: FREEPIK***

As the world continues to recover from massive business and travel disruptions caused by a faulty software update from cybersecurity firm CrowdStrike, malicious actors are trying to exploit the situation for their own gain.

Government cybersecurity agencies across the globe and even CrowdStrike CEO George Kurtz are warning businesses and individuals around the world about new phishing schemes that involve malicious actors posing as CrowdStrike employees or other tech specialists offering to assist those recovering from the outage.

"We know that adversaries and bad actors will try to exploit events like this," Kurtz said in a statement. "I encourage everyone to remain vigilant and ensure that you're engaging with official CrowdStrike representatives."

The UK Cyber Security Centre said they have noticed an increase in phishing attempts around this event.

Microsoft said 8.5 million devices running its Windows operating system were affected by the faulty cybersecurity update Friday that led to worldwide disruptions. That's less than 1 per cent of all Windows-based machines, Microsoft cybersecurity executive David Weston said in a blog post Saturday.

He also said such a significant disturbance is rare but "demonstrates the interconnected nature of our broad ecosystem".

What's happening with air travel?

By late morning on the US East Coast, airlines around the world had cancelled more than 1,500 flights, far fewer than the 5,100-plus cancellations on Friday, according to figures from tracking service FlightAware.

Two-thirds of Saturday's cancelled flights occurred in the United States, where carriers scrambled to get planes and crews back into position after massive disruptions the day before. According to travel-data provider Cirium, US carriers cancelled about 3.5 per cent of their scheduled flights for Saturday. Cancelled flights were running at about 1 per cent in the United Kingdom, France and Brazil and about 2 per cent in Canada, Italy and India among major air-travel markets.

Robert Mann, a former airline executive and now a consultant in the New York area, said it was unclear exactly why US airlines were suffering disproportionate cancellations, but possible causes include a greater degree of outsourcing of technology and more exposure to Microsoft operating systems that received the faulty upgrade from CrowdStrike.

How are healthcare systems holding up?

Health care systems affected by the outage faced clinic closures, cancelled surgeries and appointments and restricted access to patient records.

Cedars-Sinai Medical Centre in Los Angeles, Calif., said "steady progress has been made" to bring its servers back online and thanked its patients for being flexible during the crisis.

"Our teams will be working actively through the weekend as we continue to resolve remaining issues in preparation for the start of the work week," the hospital wrote.

In Austria, a leading organization of doctors said the outage exposed the vulnerability of relying on digital systems. Harald Mayer, vice president of the Austrian Chamber of Doctors, said the outage showed that hospitals need to have analog backups to protect patient care.

The organisation also called on governments to impose high standards in patient data protection and security, and on health providers to train staff and put systems in place to manage crises.

"Happily, where there were problems, these were kept small and short-lived and many areas of care were unaffected" in Austria, Mayer said.

The Schleswig-Holstein University Hospital in northern Germany, which cancelled all elective procedures Friday, said Saturday that systems were gradually being restored and elective surgery could resume by Monday .—*AP*

SALAR سالار

What Covid revealed about gender inequality in India

How do you assess the impact of the Covid pandemic on a population?

One way is by examining life expectancy, or the average number of years a person can expect to live.

A team of 10 researchers from the UK, the US and Europe have studied the mortality impacts of the pandemic in India by sex, social group and age. Their peer-reviewed paper has been published in Science Advances, a US journal.

They found that life expectancy at birth in India was 2.6 years lower and mortality was 17 per cent higher in 2020 compared to 2019. This implied 1.19 million excess deaths in 2020. Excess deaths are a simple measure of how many more people are dying than expected, compared with previous years.

The researchers of the new study say life expectancy declines in India were larger and affected a younger age profile compared to high-income countries.

They found that mortality rose among all age groups, but compared to high-income countries, the increase was particularly pronounced in younger age groups, leading to larger declines in life expectancy.

The researchers also found something which was more worrying.

For one, females experienced a life expectancy decline of one year greater than males. This contrasts with patterns in most other countries and may be due to gender inequality, say the researchers from University of Oxford, University of California, Berkeley and Paris School of Economics, among others.

Also, marginalised social groups - Muslims, Dalits, and tribespeople - in India saw larger declines in life expectancy compared to privileged upper caste people, exacerbating existing disparities.

The researchers agree that before Covid, these groups already had significant disadvantages in life expectancy. The pandemic worsened these disparities, with declines comparable to or greater than those seen among Native Americans, Blacks, and Hispanics in the US in 2020, the study says.

"These findings uncover large and unequal mortality impacts during the pandemic in the world's most populous country," Sangita Vyas, of CUNY Hunter College and one of the researchers, told me.

More than 4.7 million people in India - nearly 10 times higher than official records suggest - are thought to have died because of Covid, according to a 2022 World Health Organisation (WHO) report. India's government rejected the figure, saying the methodology was flawed.

To be sure, the latest study looked at deaths from all causes, not just deaths from Covid. "For that reason we can't conclude that women in India were more likely to die of Covid than men," says Vyas. "What we can conclude is that the increase in mortality from all causes was greater for women than men".

The researchers believe these patterns partly stem from gender inequality.

Previous research shows Indian households spend less on healthcare for females compared to males, a disparity which likely worsened during the pandemic. Fewer females appear in India's official Covid-19 case data, despite surveys showing similar infection rates among males and females.

Furthermore, severe disruptions to maternal healthcare and livelihoods due to lockdowns likely contributed to these trends.

How did the researchers come to these findings? They surveyed data of more than 765,000 people - a sample size that accurately reflects the diversity and distribution of a quarter of India's population - to identify patterns missed by incomplete data and disease surveillance.

India's National Family Health Survey 5 collected high quality data on recent household deaths and socio-economic characteristics. This allowed researchers to analyse age, sex, and group-specific mortality patterns. They compared mortality in 2019 and 2020 using data from the same households interviewed in 2021.

The researchers believe more research is necessary to explore why females in India experienced higher excess deaths than males, why excess mortality affected younger age groups more in India compared to other countries, and why Muslims saw significant declines in life expectancy compared to other social groups.

"These patterns likely resulted from disparities in healthcare access and underlying health, differing impacts of lockdowns on public health and livelihoods, and increased discrimination against marginalised groups," says Vyas.. —*PTI*

Life expectancy at birth in India was 2.6 years lower and mortality was 17 per cent higher in 2020 compared to 2019. This implied 1.19 million excess deaths in 2020 ***PHOTO: EAST ASIA FORUM***

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Elderly population in India expected to double by 2050: UNFPA

India's elderly population is expected to double by 2050, UNFPA India chief Andrea Wojnar said, stressing that more investment in healthcare, housing and pensions is needed, especially for older women who are "more likely to live alone and face poverty".

In an interview with PTI given days after the World Population Day on 11 July, Resident Representative for UNFPA India, Wojnar, outlined key population trends that India is prioritising to accelerate sustainable development.

These trends include the youthful population, ageing population, urbanisation, migration, and climate resilience, each presenting unique challenges and opportunities for the nation.

She said as the number of individuals, aged 60 and above, is projected to double to 346 million by 2050, there is a pressing need for increased investment in healthcare, housing and pension schemes.

"...especially for older women who are more likely to live alone and face poverty," she said.

India boasts a substantial youthful population, with 252 million people aged between 10 and 19 years, the UNFPA India head said.

She highlighted that investing in health, education, job training, and job creation, alongside promoting gender equality, can unlock the potential of this demographic, driving the nation toward sustainable progress.

"With India projected to be 50 per cent urban by 2050, building smart cities, strong infrastructure, and affordable housing is crucial to manage slum growth, air pollution, and environmental issues," Wojnar said.

"Urban plans should also consider women's needs for safety and security, and access to health care and education and jobs to promote gender equality and improve overall quality of life," she said.

She also noted that managing internal and external migration requires meticulous planning, skills development, and economic opportunity distribution.

Addressing the specific challenges faced by women as migrants or spouses left behind is essential for balanced growth. Integrating climate resilience into development plans and investing in renewable energy is vital, she said.

"Climate change can affect reproductive health, making it harder to conceive, causing pregnancy complications, and limiting healthcare access during emergencies. Addressing these issues is key for gender equality and sustainable development," she said.

The number of individuals, aged 60 and above, is projected to double to 346 million by 2050 and there is a pressing need for increased investment in healthcare, housing and pension schemes ***PHOTO: FREEPIK***

By focusing on these trends, India continues to strive for more sustainable and equitable growth, Wojnar added.

Noting that India, the first country to implement a national family planning programme, has made significant progress, she said "some challenges remain".

"With 9.4 per cent of family planning needs unmet and 7.5 per cent of pregnancies unplanned, according to the latest data from NFHS-5 (2019-21). This year's theme supports efforts to improve access to contraceptives and family planning resources, particularly in high-need areas," she said.

Emphasising informed choices showcases the transformative impact on public health, promoting healthier families and communities, she said this focus also aligns with the international theme.

- India boasts a substantial youthful population, with 252 million people aged between 10 and 19 years

"Embracing the power of inclusive data towards a resilient and equitable future for all," she underscored the importance of data-driven policies to ensure universal access to resources and services.

On this year's theme of the World Population Day, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) is highlighting "Healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies for the well-being of mother and child" as they are essential for maternal and child health, with experts recommending at least 24 months between giving birth and becoming pregnant again. This reduces health risks and strengthens family bonds.

She said UNFPA, in 2023, distributed 1,00,000 Single Rod Subdermal Implants and 2,00,000 doses of DMPA SC (Antara-SC) across 10 Indian states.

"These long-lasting, reversible contraceptives are ideal for young people and couples seeking to delay or space pregnancies," she said.

As part of the FP 2030 (Family Planning) Partnership, the UNFPA chief said India is enhancing contraceptive choices, promoting healthy pregnancy spacing, and increasing access to family planning services, especially in high-need and underserved areas. Efforts also focus on changing social and behavioral attitudes toward family planning.

Since 2023, UNFPA has trained 47 midwifery educators at the National Midwifery Training Institutes in Udaipur and Patiala, she said.

These educators have supported over 5,000 prenatal visits and assisted with 550 normal deliveries, allowing women to choose their birthing positions and have companions, including a male partner, providing crucial emotional support and fostering stronger family relationships, Wojnar said.

Noting that respectful maternity care empowers women to make informed decisions about their reproductive health, she said these efforts aim to reduce maternal deaths and improve health outcomes for mothers and babies, particularly in underserved areas. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Residents protest over power cuts in Russia

MOSCOW, 21 JULY

Residents angry over recent power cuts in southern Russia staged a rare public protest on Saturday in the city of Krasnodar, posts on social media said, as the local governor blamed a heatwave for causing the blackouts. The south of Russia has been affected by unusually hot weather that has caused mass power outages in several regions and led to the shutdown earlier this week of one of four power units at the Rostov nuclear power plant, the region's largest. One video appeared to show police making at least two arrests during Saturday's protest. Russia have clamped down on any protest activity, since the start of the conflict with Ukraine in February 2022, and public protests are very rare given the risk of arrest. *—Arab News*

Plane crash near Ohio airport kills 3

VIENNA, 21 JULY

A plane trying to make an emergency landing at an airport in US's northeastern Ohio crashed, killing all three people aboard, authorities said. The twin-engine Beechcraft 60 went down near the Youngstown-Warren Regional Airport in Ohio at about 6.45 pm Friday, the Federal Aviation Administration said Saturday. The Ohio State Highway Patrol post in Trumbull County, which was notified shortly after 7 pm Friday, said the crash just north of the airport killed the pilot and two passengers. "A mechanical failure is suspected and the aircraft was reported as attempting to make an emergency landing", the Warren post of the highway patrol said in a news release Saturday afternoon. *—AP*

Greek border guard shot at Turkey border

THESSALONIKI, 21 JULY

A Greek border guard was shot in the abdomen Saturday while patrolling an area of the Greek-Turkish border where undocumented migrants seek to enter the European Union, Greek police said. The injuries are not life-threatening. Four Greek border guard officers were on duty along the Evros River, the land border with Turkey, shortly after 6 pm Saturday, when three or four shots rang out from the Turkish side, police said. A bullet hit one of the border guards in the lower abdomen. The injured man was taken to a hospital in the town of Didymoteicho, where he was operated on, police said. Police added that the injured officer was in stable, non-life-threatening condition. *—AP*

12-yr-old kills younger sister over iPhone

HUMBOLDT, 21 JULY

A 12-year-old girl in Tennessee has been charged with murder, accused of smothering her 8-year-old cousin as the younger girl slept. A relative said they had been arguing over an iPhone. A security camera recorded the killing, inside the bedroom they shared on 15 July in Humboldt, Tennessee. The recording shows the older child using bedding to suffocate her cousin as the younger girl slept in the top bunk, Gibson District Attorney Frederick Agee's statement said. After the child died, "the juvenile cleaned up the victim and repositioned her body," Agee said. A relative said that the girls had been arguing over an iPhone after coming from out of town to stay with their grandmother. The girl was charged with first-degree murder and tampering with evidence. *—AP*

B'desh SC scraps job quotas after unrest

After riots killed over 105, top court directs that 93% of jobs will be allocated on merit

Students clash with police during a protest over the quota system in public service, in Dhaka, Bangladesh; An injured student is carried on a stretcher to a hospital, in Dhaka, on Saturday *PHOTO: PTI*

DHAKA, 21 JULY

Bangladesh's top court on Sunday scaled back a controversial quota system for government job applicants, in a partial victory for student protesters after days of nationwide unrest and deadly clashes between police and demonstrators that have killed hundreds of people.

Students, frustrated by shortages of good jobs, have been demanding an end to a quota that reserved 30 per cent of government jobs for relatives of veterans who fought in Bangladesh's war of independence in 1971. The government previously halted it in 2018 following mass student protests, but in June, Bangladesh's High Court reinstated the quotas and set off a new round of protests. Ruling on an appeal, the Supreme Court ordered that the veterans' quota be cut to 5 per cent , with 93 per cent of jobs to be allocated on merit. The remaining 2 per cent will be set aside for members of ethnic minorities and transgender and disabled people.

Police has imposed a strict curfew with a "shoot-on-sight" order across Bangladesh as military forces patrolled parts of the capital on Saturday after scores were killed and hundreds injured in clashes.

The protests have posed the most serious challenge to Bangladesh's government since Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina won a fourth consecutive term in January elections that were boycotted by the main Opposition groups. The protests turned deadly on Tuesday, a day after students at Dhaka University began clashing with police.

Bangladeshi authorities haven't shared any official numbers of those killed and injured, but the Daily Prothom Alo newspaper reported Saturday that at least 103 people have died so far.

Meanwhile, the government has declared Sunday and Monday as public holidays, with only emergency services allowed to operate.

The main Opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has backed the protests, vowing to organize its own demonstrations as many of its supporters have joined the student-led protests. *—PTI*

US asks citizens not to travel to Bangladesh

WASHINGTON, 21 JULY

The United States has recommended that its citizens do not travel to Bangladesh and allowed the voluntary departure of its non-emergency government employees and family members in view of the ongoing civil unrest in the South Asian country.

The development comes just a day after the US issued a new travel advisory for Bangladesh, urging Americans to reconsider their travel to the strife-torn country.

Authorities in Bangladesh has imposed a strict curfew across the country and military personnel patrolled parts of the capital to quell further violence after days of clashes over the allocation of government jobs left more than 40 people dead and hundreds injured.

The advisory said attacks can happen with little or no warning, with terrorists targeting public areas such as tourist locations, transportation hubs. *—AP*

WHO WERE RAZAKARS?

Razakars were a paramilitary force during the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 who opposed the independence movement. On 14 July, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said, "If the grandchildren of freedom fighters do not receive quota benefits, who would get it? The grandchildren of Razakars?" To which the protesters shot back: Who are you? Who am I? Razakar, Razakar!" *—Agencies*

Oil tanks burn at the port in Hodeidah, Yemen *PHOTO: PTI*

At least 3 killed as Israel attacks Houthis

TEL AVIV, 21 JULY

Israel has carried out air strikes on the Houthi-controlled Red Sea port of Hodeidah in Yemen killing 3, a day after a drone launched by the group hit Tel Aviv.

Defence Minister Yoav Gallant said his country aimed to send a message to the Houthi movement.

"The fire that is currently burning in Hodeidah, is seen across the Middle East and the significance is clear," he said.

Houthi-linked news outlets said three people were killed and more than 80 injured in Saturday's strikes, in what Houthi official Mohammed Abdulsalam said was a "brutal Israel aggression against Yemen".

On Sunday morning, the Israeli military said it had shot down a missile fired from Yemen before it crossed into Israel's air space.

It added that air sirens had been activated in Israel's Red Sea port of Eilat "following the possibility of falling shrapnel". Abdulsalam said that the Israeli strikes were aimed at pressuring the Houthis to stop supporting the Palestinians in Gaza, something he said would not happen.

It is the first time Israel has responded directly to what it says have been hundreds of Yemeni drone and missile attacks aimed at its territory in recent months.

Footage from Hodeidah showed huge fires raging on Saturday evening. The Houthi-run government in Sanaa said Israel struck oil storage facilities close to the shore, as well as a nearby power plant. *—AP*

N Korea floats more trash balloons toward S Korea

SEOUL, 21 JULY

North Korea launched more balloons likely carrying rubbish toward South Korea on Sunday, two days after the South restarted blaring anti-Pyongyang propaganda broadcasts across the border in retaliation for the North's repeated balloon campaigns, Seoul officials said.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the North Korean balloons were flying north of Seoul, the South Korean capital, after crossing the border. It said the South Korean public should be alert for falling objects and report to police and military authorities if they see any balloons fallen on the ground.

North Korea's latest balloon flying is threatening to escalate tensions on the Korean Peninsula. South Korea earlier warned it would conduct loudspeaker broadcasts in a fuller manner and take other stronger steps if North Korea continues provocations like balloon launches.

Since late May, North Korea has floated numerous balloons on a series of launch events to drop scraps of cloth, cigarette butts.

North Korea said the initial balloons were launched in response to South Korean activists sending political leaflets to the North via their own balloons. *—AP*

DISNEYLAND WORKERS VOTE TO AUTHORISE STRIKE

CALIFORNIA, 21 JULY

Thousands of workers at Disney's theme park and resort properties in California voted late Friday to authorise a potential strike, as contract negotiations drag on over wages, sick leave and other benefits.

The strike authorization was approved by an overwhelming margin, nearly 99 per cent of the members who cast votes, according to a union statement. The election was held by a coalition of four unions, which represents 14,000 Disney ride operators, store clerks, custodians, candy makers, ticket takers, parking attendants and other employees.

The vote does not mean a strike will happen, only that union leaders now have the option to call a strike in the event that they are unable to negotiate a new contract deal with Disney. Leaders from both sides return to the bargaining table starting Monday.

Union members have been in talks with Disney over wage increases, safety measures, attendance policies and other benefits since April. *—AP*

China's threat increased, say 60% Taiwanese

TAIPEI, 21 JULY

A survey by Taiwan-based Academia Sinica has claimed that nearly 60 per cent of Taiwan's residents say China's threat against Taiwan has increased in the last few years.

The Voice of America.James Lee, an assistant research fellow at Academia Sinica's Institute of European and American Studies, was quoted as saying, "The broad themes that the survey addresses are the credibility of the United States , and how respondents in Taiwan interpret US and Chinese signals." 80.6 per cent believe Taiwan and China do not belong to the same country, while 13.6 per cent said Taiwan and China belong to the same country. *—ANI*

US ELECTIONS

Trump says he 'took a bullet for democracy'

Republican vice presidential candidate Sen. JD Vance with Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump *PHOTO: PTI*

WASHINGTON, 21 JULY

Former US president Donald Trump in his first campaign rally since surviving an attempted assassination attempt has dismissed concerns raised by critics that he is a threat to democracy, telling a large crowd in Michigan that he "took a bullet for democracy."

In the rally in Michigan on Saturday, Trump, who is the Republican presidential nominee for the 5 November elections, was joined by his running mate JD Vance.

More than 12,000 people piled into the Van Andel Arena in Grand Rapids to see him and his running mate.

"They keep saying he's a threat to democracy. I'm saying, ''What the hell did I do to democracy?' Last week I took a bullet for democracy," Trump said, referencing an often-used Democrat talking point.

Trump's comments come one week since the former president survived an assassination attempt while campaigning in Pennsylvania. He was shot in the ear less than 10 minutes into his speech, prompting him to be escorted off stage. One attendee and the shooter died during the attack while two others were injured.

Trump thanked the staff at Butler Memorial Hospital, where he was taken minutes after the shooting.

Meanwhile, Trump's followers on social media have seen a sudden surge. His followers have increased by millions in a week after the shooting in Pennsylvania. Trump holds 51 per cent more followers on Instagram than his competitor President Joe Biden. *—AP*

PELOSI SKIPS BIDEN'S FUTURE IN SPEECH

RALEIGH, 21 JULY

In a state expected to help decide the presidency, House Speaker Emerita Nancy Pelosi did little to quell speculation on President Joe Biden's path forward as the Democratic nominee to a room full of North Carolina Democrats on Saturday.

Pelosi addressed more than 900 people at the North Carolina Democratic Party fundraiser in Raleigh — an event billed as the annual "Unity Dinner" during a time of significant national discord over how the party will proceed in the 2024 presidential election. When she did mention Biden, it was mostly to tout his administration's policies.

Since Biden's dismal showing in the 27 June debate with former Republican President Donald Trump, significant fallout has ensued within the Democratic Party on whether the president is capable of defeating Trump. *—AP*

China, Philippines agree to stop clashes

MANILA, 21 JULY

China and the Philippines reached a deal they hope will end confrontations at the most fiercely disputed shoal in the South China Sea, two Philippine officials said Sunday.

The Philippines occupies Second Thomas Shoal but China also claims it, and increasingly hostile clashes at sea have sparked fears of larger conflicts that could involve the United States.

The crucial deal was reached on Sunday, after a series of meetings between Philippine and Chinese diplomats in Manila and exchanges of diplomatic notes that aimed to establish a mutually acceptable arrangement at the shoal without conceding either side's territorial claims. The Philippine officials, who have knowledge of the negotiations, confirmed the deal to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity ahead of a public announcement.

China has disputes with several governments over land and sea borders, many of them in the South China Sea, and the rare deal with the Philippines could spark hope that similar arrangements could be forged by Beijing with other rival countries to avoid clashes while thorny territorial issues remain unresolved. It remains to be seen, however, if the deal could be implemented successfully and how long it will last. *—AP*

ROAD RAGE INCIDENT

Newly-wed Indian shot dead in US

WASHINGTON, 21 JULY

A 29-year-old newly wedded Indian-origin man was shot dead in front of his wife in a suspected road rage incident in the US state of Indiana, police and media reports said. The incident happened when Gavin Dasaur was on his way home with his Mexican wife.

Indianapolis Police Department (IMPD) Officer Amanda Hibschman said officers responded to a report of a person shot just after 8pm on Tuesday last week at an intersection on Indy city's southeast side.

Arriving officers said they found a man on the ground in the middle of the road suffering from at least one gunshot wound. The man's wife identified the shooting victim.

Cell phone video recorded by another driver at the scene shows Dasaur getting out of his car at the intersection *PHOTO: SCREENGRAB*

Dasaur, reported to be hailing from Agra, and Viviana ZaMora, had just got married on 29 June, a little over two weeks before his death.

Witnesses told police the shooting occurred over a road-rage incident between the Chevy driver and Dasaur, who was driving a black Honda, local WTHR reports.

The suspected shooter, Hibschman said, was detained at the scene.

Cell phone video recorded by another driver at the scene shows Dasaur getting out of his car at the intersection.

Dasaur appears irate and is yelling at the driver of the pickup truck, Fox News reported.

A handgun can clearly be seen in Dasaur's right hand.

As he approaches the driver's side of the pickup truck, Dasaur punches the truck's door with the gun in his hand.

The driver of the pickup responds by shooting three times. *—PTI*

How China swerved worst of global tech meltdown

BEIJING, 21 JULY

While most of the world was grappling with the blue screen of death on Friday, one country that managed to escape largely unscathed was China.

The reason is actually quite simple: CrowdStrike is hardly used there.

Very few organisations will buy software from an American firm that, in the past, has been vocal about the cyber-security threat posed by Beijing.

Additionally, China is not as reliant on Microsoft as the rest of the world. Domestic companies such as Alibaba, Tencent and Huawei are the dominant cloud providers.

So reports of outages in China, when they did come, were mainly at foreign firms or organisations. On Chinese social media sites, for example, some users complained they were not able to check into international chain hotels such as Sheraton, Marriott and Hyatt in Chinese cities.

Beijing sees avoiding reliance on foreign systems as a way of shoring up national security. It is similar to the way some Western countries banned Chinese tech firm Huawei's technology in 2019 - or the UK's move to ban the use of Chinese-owned TikTok on government devices in 2023. Since then, the US has launched a concerted effort to ban sales of advanced semiconductor chip tech to China, as well as attempts to stop American companies from investing in Chinese technology. *—BBC News*

NLC to raise funds via IPO for clean energy expansion

NEW DELHI, 21 JULY

Lignite-to-power producer NLC India Ltd (NLCIL) is planning to raise funds through an initial public offering (IPO) of its wholly owned subsidiary NLC India Renewables Ltd by the first quarter of the next financial year, company's Chairman and Managing Director (CMD) Prasanna Kumar Motupalli said. The funds raised via the IPO will be used in its clean energy expansion plans, he said. The company also plans to arrange soft loans from foreign companies and banks for this purpose, the CMD explained. The PSU, he said, has formed another subsidiary NLC India Green Energy Ltd for new green energy assets. As a result, NCL India Ltd, a carbon neutral company, is adding the capacity in both thermal and renewable energy space. NLC India is a 6 GW company consisting of 1.4 GW renewable capacity and 4.6 GW thermal capacity. NLC India -- the first company in the country to add 1 GW renewable capacity -- has plans to scale up its power capacity to 17 GW by 2030. *—PTI*

Mother Dairy aims at ₹ 17,000 cr turnover in FY25

NEW DELHI, 21 JULY

Mother Dairy is targeting a 13 per cent growth in its turnover to Rs 17,000 crore this fiscal, as it expects higher demand for its dairy and edible oils products. Mother Dairy is a leading milk supplier in Delhi-NCR. It sells edible oils pan-India under the 'Dhara' brand and markets fresh fruits and vegetables in Delhi-NCR through around 400 'Safal' retail outlets. The onset of the 2024-25 fiscal has been very encouraging with most of its summer-led categories like curd, ice creams and dairy beverages, among others, having grown collectively by more than 40 per cent in volume terms. The company plans to introduce new products to build a strong portfolio, with focus areas in fermented dairy, sweets and cheese, among others. *—PTI*

Tropical Agrosystem eyes expansion, possible mkt debut

NEW DELHI, 21 JULY

Agrochemical company Tropical Agrosystem is exploring the possibility of listing on the domestic stock market as it plans expansion and launch of new products, according to a top company official. The Chennai-based company, which focuses on agrochemical formulations, plans to invest Rs 150 crore to build two new agrochemical plants in Chennai and Kolkata in the next two years. Tropical Agrosystem aims to become debt-free this year and plans to merge with another arm of the company if it decides to list. The firm operates seven manufacturing units across five states - Karnataka, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh. *—PTI*

EESL to soon launch 'Urja Dakshta Dukan'

NEW DELHI, 21 JULY

State-owned Energy Efficiency Services Ltd (EESL) will soon introduce retail franchisee shops called 'Urja Dakshta Dukan' which will offer affordable energy-efficient products like LED lights, ACs and fans to consumers, a senior official said. EESL, at present, distributes products through retail tie-ups with power distribution utilities to consumers. Buyers can also purchase the products online from its web portal EESLMART.in. The first batch of franchisee outlets is expected to open in Jharkhand, Maharashtra and Telangana, the official said. The invitation for pan India franchise tie-ups will be available on the EESL website from August. These retail shops will create maximum visibility amongst targeted consumers for adopting energy-efficient product lines. *—PTI*

FM set to make history with 7th Budget

Nimmi surpasses record of ex-prime minister Morarji Desai who presented 5 full Budget

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman holds the record for longest budget speech on 1 February, 2020 ***PHOTO: ANI***

NEW DELHI, 21 JULY

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is set to create history when she presents her seventh straight Budget on Tuesday for the fiscal 2024-25, surpassing record of former prime minister Morarji Desai.

The full Budget for the 2024-25 fiscal (April 2024 to March 2025) will be her seventh straight. She will better Desai's record, who presented consecutive five full budgets and one interim budget between 1959 to 1964.

The presentation on 23 July will be the first Budget by BJP-led NDA government since it was re-elected last month.

1st Budget: The first-ever Union Budget of independent India was presented on November 26, 1947, by the nation's first finance minister RK Shanmukham Chetty.

Most number of budgets: Former Prime Minister Morarji Desai holds the record for presenting the most budgets. He has presented a total of 10 budgets during his tenure as finance minister under Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and later under Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri.

2nd highest number of budget: Former finance minister P Chidambaram presented the budget on nine occasions.

3rd highest number of budgets: Pranab Mukherjee presented eight budgets during his tenure as finance minister.

Longest Budget speech: Sitharaman holds the record for the longest budget speech when her presentation on February 1, 2020, lasted two hours and 40 minutes.

Shortest budget speech: Hirubhai Mulljibhai Patel's interim Budget speech in 1977 is so far the shortest at just 800 words.

Timing: Timing was changed in 1999 when the then finance minister Yashwant Singh presented budget at 11am. *—PTI*

USIBC seeks PLI for media this Budget

A top India-centric American trade body on Sunday recommended that the Indian government should introduce production-linked incentives for the media and entertainment industry in the upcoming Budget. USIBC, in its memorandum, suggested removing restrictions on perishable goods shipped via courier to ensure swift clearance, supporting perishable trade dynamics and a single window system. *—PTI*

BUDGET, GLOBAL TRENDS TO DRIVE MKT: ANALYSTS

NEW DELHI, 21 JULY

The outcome of the Union Budget, quarterly earnings from corporates and global trends are the major factors to drive stock market sentiments this week, analysts said.

Besides, the trading activity of foreign investors, the rupee-dollar trend and the movement of global oil benchmark Brent crude are also crucial aspects to watch out for.

The Union Budget will provide the next set of directions to the market, Siddhartha Khemka, Head - Retail Research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said.

HDFC Bank will remain in focus on Monday after the company's consolidated net profit grew 33.17 per cent to Rs 16,474.85 crore in the June 2024 quarter. *—PTI*

AFTERMATH OF OUTAGE

Microsoft deploys experts, engineers to restore services

NEW DELHI, 21 JULY

PHOTO: UNSPLASH

US software giant Microsoft has deployed hundreds of engineers and experts with its customers to restore their services after an outage caused by its cyber security partner CrowdStrike, the company said in a blog.

According to Microsoft, 8.5 million devices across the world were impacted by the outage caused by an update from CrowdStrike on 18 July.

"Deploying hundreds of Microsoft engineers and experts to work directly with customers to restore services," Microsoft said in a blog post on 20 July.

The outage put operations of businesses and systems across the globe in a state of limbo.

Airport and airline operations faced significant disruptions due to the outage, with airlines issuing advisories to passengers. IndiGo, SpiceJet and Akasa saw disruptions in their online check-in and boarding processes across their networks, forcing them to switch to manual mode.

Microsoft said that it is collaborating with other cloud providers and stakeholders, including Google Cloud Platform (GCP) and Amazon Web Services (AWS), to share awareness on the state of impact that it is seeing across the industry and inform ongoing conversations with CrowdStrike and customers.

The software major said that while software updates may occasionally cause disturbances, significant incidents like the CrowdStrike event are infrequent. *—PTI*

FPIS INVEST ₹ 30,772 CR IN EQUITIES IN JULY

NEW DELHI, 21 JULY

Foreign investors injected Rs 30,772 crore into Indian equities so far this month, driven by hopes of continued policy reforms, sustained economic growth and a better-than-expected earnings season.

Going forward, if the recent trend of weakness in dollar and bond yields persists, FPIs are likely to continue their buying in the market, VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, said.

Domestic and foreign investors are keenly watching for possible tweaks in the long-term capital gains tax in the Budget to be presented on 23 July.

According to the data with the depositories, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) have made a net inflow of Rs 30,772 crore in equities this month.

This came following an inflow of Rs 26,565 crore in equities in the entire June driven by stability and sharp rebound in markets.

Apart from equities, FPIs invested Rs 13,573 crore in the debt market during the period under review. This has pushed the debt tally to Rs 82,197 crore this year so far. *—PTI*

Goldman, Morgan Stanley top investors in Vedanta QIP

NEW DELHI, 21 JULY

Vedanta sold 19.31 cr shares to raise Rs 8,500 crore ***PHOTO: ANI***

Mining conglomerate Vedanta Limited raised Rs 8,500 crore (over USD 1 billion) through Qualified Institutions Placement (QIP) of 19.31 crore equity shares at an issue price of Rs 440 per share, according to a stock exchange filing by the company.

The issue, which closed on 19 July, implied a discount of 4.61 per cent to the floor price of Rs 461.26 per equity share.

In a stock exchange filing, Vedanta said it sold 19.31 crore shares to raise Rs 8,500 crore.

Some of the marquee investors that have been allotted equity shares through the QIP include Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA), Goldman Sachs AMC, Nippon Mutual Fund, SBI Mutual Fund, UTI Mutual Fund, ICICI Mutual Fund, Aditya Birla Mutual Fund and Mirae Mutual Fund.

Various funds run by Nippon Mutual Fund were allotted 9.11 per cent of the total issue size, while funds managed by Morgan Stanley and SBI Mutual Fund received 8.62 per cent and 7.88 per cent, respectively.

Vedanta delivered a strong financial performance and growth on multiple fronts, with many of its businesses -- Aluminium, Zinc, Silver, Steel, Iron Ore, and Ferrochrome -- achieving their highest-ever annual production levels in the last fiscal. For FY24, the company recorded its second-highest annual consolidated revenue of Rs 1,41,793 crore and second-highest annual EBITDA of Rs 36,455 crores. *—PTI*

Mcap of 8 of top-10 most valued firms jumps ₹ 2.10 lakh cr; TCS, LIC sparkle

NEW DELHI, 21 JULY

Last week, Sensex hit new all time high of 81,587.76 ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

The combined market valuation of eight of the top-10 most valued firms jumped Rs 2,10,330.26 crore in a holiday-shorted last week, with Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) and Life Insurance Corporation of India emerging as the biggest gainers.

Last week, the BSE benchmark climbed 85.31 points or 0.10 per cent. The 30-share BSE Sensex hit its new all-time high of 81,587.76 on Friday.

From the top-10 group, the valuation of TCS zoomed Rs 42,639.16 crore to Rs 15,56,772.61 crore. The market capitalisation (mcap) of Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) surged Rs 36,748.23 crore to Rs 7,01,695.24 crore.

Infosys added Rs 33,569.16 crore, taking its valuation to Rs 7,44,396.43 crore, while State Bank of India's mcap climbed Rs 26,372.23 crore to Rs 7,93,576.49 crore.

The market valuation of Bharti Airtel went up by Rs 16,223.03 crore to Rs 8,31,928.39 crore, and that of ICICI Bank climbed Rs 10,863.44 crore to Rs 8,78,531.60 crore.

However, the market valuation of Reliance Industries diminished by Rs 56,799.01 crore to Rs 21,03,829.74 crore.

The mcap of HDFC Bank declined by Rs 13,124.01 crore to Rs 12,22,701.34 crore.

In the top-10 table, Reliance Industries retained the title of the most valued firm, followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Bharti Airtel, State Bank of India, Infosys, LIC, Hindustan Unilever and ITC. *—PTI*

PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA

Airbus shortlists 8 sites for H125 aircraft in India

MARIGNANE, 21 JULY

European major Airbus has shortlisted eight sites in India for setting up its final assembly line for H125 helicopters and the ground-breaking ceremony for the facility is expected later this year.

The facility, which will be the fourth Final Assembly Line (FAL) for the single engine H125, will initially produce up to 10 helicopters annually and the capacity will be ramped up depending on the market demand, Airbus officials said.

The ground breaking ceremony for the FAL is expected in October or November this year and the facility will be operational in 2026 and the delivery is anticipated to start towards the end of 2026. *—PTI*

GTRI: Rules, import cuts hurt garment export growth

Textile industry, valued at $250B, provides jobs to 50M ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

NEW DELHI, 21 JULY

Issues like complex procedures of DGFT and customs, import restrictions and domestic vested interests are holding up the export growth of the Indian garment sector, think tank GTRI said on Sunday.

At the root of the exporters' problem is difficulty in obtaining quality raw fabric, particularly synthetic fabric, the Global Trade Research Initiative said.

A GTRI report alleged that the procedures of DGFT and customs are archaic, and it requires exporters to meticulously account for every square centimetre of fabric, buttons, and zippers used.

India's textile industry, valued at USD 250 billion, provides jobs to 50 million people. The sector is divided into three broad categories - Textiles (fibre, yarn, and fabrics); Garments and; Made-ups (Bed sheets, curtains etc.). India is present across all parts of the value chain.

In 2023, China exported USD 114 billion worth of garments, followed by the EU (USD 94.4 billion), Vietnam (USD 81.6 billion), Bangladesh (USD 43.8 billion), and India with just USD 14.5 billion.

Textile imports also saw a notable increase of 20.86 per cent, from USD 5.77 billion to USD 6.97 billion. *—PTI*

India issues over 300 notices to promote food safety: Data

NEW DELHI, 21 JULY

India has issued over 300 notifications since January 2020 to promote food safety, protect animals and plant health, and maintain the quality of products in the markets, according to the commerce ministry data.

These notifications are issued under Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT). Both are allowed under the World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules.

TBT and SPS are non-tariff measures (NTMs).

SPS is used by countries to set out basic rules for food safety and animal and plant health requirements.

On the other hand, TBT deals with voluntary and mandatory standards and procedures to maintain the quality of products in the markets. When these regulations impose an unnecessary burden on trade, then they become non-tariff barriers (NTBs).

The data showed that as many as 62 SPS and 247 TBT notifications were issued by India since January 2020.

According to experts, gradually customs duties are going down in the world, and issuance of these regulators is increasing as globally, there is a focus on quality and standards of goods.

"India should also use these regulations in greater numbers," experts said. *—PTI*

LIGHTER BAGS, HEAVIER HEARTS

Public feels pinch of vegetable price rise

NEW DELHI, 21 JULY

Prices of tomato rises to Rs 100 per kg in Delhi on Saturday ***PHOTO: ANI***

Those who couldn't buy fresh vegetables would smash open an onion, sprinkle salt and eat it with a roti. But even those days are gone with the humble onion just too expensive, says vegetable vendor Imad Khan, recalling the staple image of the poor in India.

About 10 km from the Sahibabad Sabzi Mandi in Ghaziabad where Khan sets up shop, homemaker Poonam Singh in Delhi's Mayur Vihar has not put tomatoes in any dish for almost a month, taking away an essential ingredient from her cooking.

Khan and Singh may be at different points on the socio-economic spectrum but sit on the same side of a graph that has put everyday vegetables out of the reach of many in Delhi-NCR.

While restaurateurs and home catering businesses are looking at how to absorb the extra costs and wondering whether they should hike their rates, home cooks are going for alternatives or just doing without.

According to the daily retail report by the Department of Consumer Affairs on Friday, potatoes were selling at the national average of nearly Rs 40 per kg going up to Rs 93 per kg, onions at the maximum price of Rs 80 per kg and an average of Rs 44 per kg, and tomatoes at maximum rate of Rs 120 per kg with an average price of Rs 73 per kg. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X/ @ACCMEDIA1

Pakistan beat Nepal in Women's Asia Cup

DAMBULLA, 21 JULY

Gull Feroza's belligerent fifty helped Pakistan beat Nepal by nine wickets here on Sunday and stay in contention for a semifinal berth in the women's Asia Cup. Feroza (57, 35b, 10x4) was helped copiously by her partner Muneeba Ali (46 not out, 34b, 8x4) as Pakistan raced past the target of 109 in just 11.5 overs. They added 105 runs for the opening wicket. Now, the Nida Dar-led side has two points from as many Group A matches, and the win also has boosted their net run rate to +0.40. However, Pakistan, who were beaten by India in their first match, will have to defeat UAE in their last group game to retain the semifinal hopes as Nepal also have two points. But for this position of relative comfort, Pakistan will have to thank Feroza and her aggressive intent. The right-hand batter was on overdrive from the word go and reached her fifty in just 30 balls, a fierce cut off left-arm spinner Kritika Marasini to deep point taking her past the mark. In contrast, Muneeba started slowly but found her range when she smashed left-arm spinner Sita Rana Magar for three fours in the sixth over. Once the right-hand-left-hand combination at the pole position got going, Nepal bowlers had nowhere to hide. Earlier, their Pakistan counterparts were in fine fettle and were led well by veteran left-arm spinner Sadia Iqbal, who operated with the new ball to take two wickets for 19 runs. Nepal were limited to a lowly 108 for six. Kabita Joshi made a 31 (23b, 4x4, 1x6) towards the end to prop up the Nepal innings which was also marred by three run outs. *—PTI*

Odisha clinch men's title at hockey East C'ships

KOLKATA, 21 JULY

Hockey Association of Odisha and Hockey Jharkhand claimed the men's and women's titles respectively at the junior East Zone Championship here on Sunday. Hockey Jharkhand beat Hockey Bengal 4-3 in the shoot-out after the match ended 1-1 in the regulation time in the women's category. The Hockey Association of Odisha triumphed over Hockey Jharkhand by a 2-0 margin in the final of the men's event. *—PTI*

Marseille in talks to sign Tottenham's Emile Hojbjerg

MARSEILLE, 21 JULY

The 28-year-old is believed to be ready to leave north London and is available for about £17m. Discussions are continuing over payment terms, but both sides expect the deal to go through. Hojbjerg joined Spurs in 2020 in a £15m deal from Southampton, when Jose Mourinho was in charge. The midfielder made 39 appearances for the club last season but only 10 of those were starts as Ange Postecoglou favoured Yves Bissouma and Pape Matar Sarr in central midfield. The Dane has entered the last year of his contract with Tottenham and will be available on a free transfer in 2025 if fresh terms are not agreed. Marseille have been on a recruitment drive since appointing former Brighton manager Roberto de Zerbi. Forward Mason Greenwood has joined from Manchester United and midfielder Ismael Kone completed a move from Watford this month, while they are reportedly interested in Arsenal striker Eddie Nketiah. *—BBC News*

Neeraj Chopra is doing intense training: Coach

Coach Klaus Bartonietz says Chopra's adductor is fine

NEW DELHI, 21 JULY

The adductor niggle that has troubled Neeraj Chopra in the past couple of months "is fine" now and the reigning Olympic champion has entered the high intensity phase of his Paris preparations, his German coach Klaus Bartonietz told PTI, dismissing concerns surrounding the Indian star's fitness.

The 26-year-old Chopra, who scripted history by winning the javelin throw gold at the Tokyo Olympics, is once again the country's best bet for a top podium finish in the Paris Games beginning on July 26.

But his season has been far from perfect in terms of fitness. Bartonietz, however, insisted that things are back on track.

"Everything is according to plan. At the moment, no issue with that (adductor niggle), it's fine, it looks good, hoping to remain like that till the Olympics," the coach, who has been with Chopra for close to five years, told PTI in an exclusive interview from Antalya, Turkiye where they are currently based for training. "It's just over two weeks left in the Olympics, so the intensity of training is high. He is having full throwing sessions."

Neeraj Chopra
photo: x@Neeraj_chopra1

None of the top javelin throwers have performed exceptionally well this season and Bartonietz suggested that the competition could be wide open in the Olympics. As usual, he would not even predict Chopra's chances.

German teenager Mex Dehning is the only one to have thrown more than 90m this year, and Bartonietz said it all boils down to momentum. *—PTI*

AI and jets are securing Olympics

PARIS, 21 JULY

A year ago, the head of the Paris Olympics boldly declared that France's capital would be "the safest place in the world" when the Games open this Friday. Tony Estanguet's confident forecast looks less far-fetched now with squadrons of police patrolling Paris' streets, fighter jets and soldiers primed to scramble, and imposing metal-fence security barriers erected like an iron curtain on both sides of the River Seine that will star in the opening show. The security operation, by the numbers: Games-time force of up to 45,000 police and gendarmes is also backed up by a 10,000 soldiers that has set up the largest military camp in Paris since World War II, from which soldiers should be able to reach any of the Olympic venues within 30 minutes. *—AP*

With mom in stands, Jarmanpreet ready for special Olympic debut

Jarmanpreet Singh
photo: x@jarmanpreet04

NEW DELHI, 21 JULY

Eight years back, when a dreamy eyed Jarmanpreet Singh was banned for failing a dope test, he didn't know what life had in store for him other than mother Kulwinder Kaur's staunch belief that her son will eventually come up trumps after battling the odds.

So when Jarmanpreet dons the India jersey to make his 107th international appearance at the Yves-du-Manoir hockey stadium against New Zealand on July 27th, his biggest support Kulwinder will be present in the stands with a prayer on her lips and cheer in her voice.

This is the first Olympics for 28-year-old Jarmanpreet, who has been a part of marquee tournaments like the World Cup, Champions Trophy, Asian Games and he wants to heal the wounds of the past by performing well in it.

"I am trying to make travel plans for my mother. I want her to be in Paris when I make my Olympic debut. She should feel proud that her son is playing the biggest tournament," Jarmanpreet, who hails from Amritsar in Punjab, told PTI .Bhasha in an exclusive interview before his departure. *—PTI*

Hungarian GP: Piastri wins first F1 race

Oscar Piastri celebrates after winning the Hungarian GP on Sunday
photo: X/@MCLARENF1

BUDAPEST, 21 JULY

Oscar Piastri took his maiden grand prix victory in a McLaren one-two ahead of Lando Norris in a dramatic race in Hungary amid a heated row over team orders.

Behind them, in a race full of see-sawing action, old rivals Lewis Hamilton and Max Verstappen collided as they disputed third place. Both continued but Hamilton held on to third and the Red Bull driver, his race full radio messages peppered with swearing, dropped back to finish fifth behind Ferrari's Charles Leclerc.

McLaren's team orders controversy unfolded as they tried to manage their way to a one-two, their first since the 2021 Italian Grand Prix. Piastri led Norris for most of the race after taking the lead in a three-car fight between them and Verstappen around the first corner.

But an earlier final pit stop for Norris - made by McLaren to protect him against Hamilton's Mercedes, which had stopped earlier - put him ahead of Piastri. Norris was repeatedly asked to slow and let Piastri back past, and reminded of his responsibility to the team, but he refused to do so until just two laps from the end.

His engineer Will Joseph reminded him to "remember every Sunday morning meeting" and "I tried to protect you". He also told him that "the way to win a championship is with the team - you're gonna need Oscar and you're going to need the team".

Norris argued that Piastri would have to catch him before he would let him by but all the time he was extending his lead. *—BBC News*

It's worth push for chances outside F1, says Daruvala

LONDON, 21 JULY

It is not all doom and gloom when a racing driver doesn't realise his dream of reaching Formula 1. Now competing in Formula E, Jehan Daruvala has made peace with fate as opportunities outside the pinnacle of motor racing are also "worth" chasing for.

The 25-year-old spent as many as four seasons in Formula 2, the feeder series to Formula 1, but was not able to take the final step on that ladder.His decision to spend that much time and money in a junior series was questioned, especially after he and Red Bull parted ways following three seasons but the racer from Mumbai has no regrets.

Over four seasons, he picked up four wins and 18 podiums but by his own admission it was not enough in the cut-throat environment he was part of. He saw his former teammates Lando Norris and Yuki Tsunoda rise up the ranks and he can only be happy for them. *—PTI*

Jehan Daruvala
photo: x@DaruvalaJehan

MAKE HISTORY

Paes, Amritraj join Tennis Hall of Fame

NEWPORT, 21 JULY

Legendary Indian tennis players, Leander Paes and Vijay Amritraj, the heroes of many a historic triumph transcending generations, on Sunday became the first two exponents of the sport from Asia to be inducted into the International Hall of Fame.

Paes, 51, whose list of achievements include the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games men's singles bronze, eight men's doubles and 10 mixed doubles grand slam crowns besides several famed Davis Cup victories, was given the rare honour in the 'Player Category'.

Vijay Amritraj, 70, reached the men's singles quarterfinals at the Wimbledon and US Open twice each besides guiding India to the Davis Cup finals twice -- in 1974 and 1987. At his peak, he was ranked No.18 in the world in singles and No. 23 in doubles.

Former tennis players Leander Paes and Vijay Amritraj pose for a photograph in London on Sunday
PHOTO: X/@PRAJYOTM

He along with Richard Evans was inducted into the Hall of fame in the 'Contributor Category'.

"Paes was inducted in the Player Category, while Amritraj and Evans were recognised as a part of the Contributor Category: honoring visionary leaders, pioneers, or individuals who have made a consummate impact on the sport. The three inductees brings the total to 267 legends from 28 nations represented in the Hall of Fame," said the International Tennis Hall of Fame statement. *—PTI*

> **It is my greatest honour to not only be on this stage with these legends of the game, but people who have inspired me every single day of my life**
>
> -Leander Paes, Indian tennis players

WOMEN'S ASIA CUP

Richa Ghosh and Harmanpreet Kaur of India run between the wickets during the match in Dambulla, Sri Lanka on Sunday *PHOTO: PTI*

Harmanpreet and Richa guide India to 78-run win over UAE

DAMBULLA, 21 JULY

Contrasting fifties from skipper Harmanpreet Kaur and Richa Ghosh were complemented nicely by the bowlers as India notched up a massive 78-run win over UAE in their second match of the ongoing women's Asia Cup T20 tournament here on Sunday.

Invited to bat, Kaur played the anchor's role to perfection with a 47-ball 66, while Ghosh produced late charge with an unbeaten 29-ball-64 to power defending champions India to 201 for five, their first-ever 200-plus score in T20Is.

The bowlers, led by Deepti Sharma (2/23), then produced a clinical show to limit UAE to 123 for 7 as India put one foot in the semifinals.

With two wins in as many games, India occupy the top spot in group A with four points and have a Net Run Rate of +3.298.

India will play their third and final group game against Nepal on Tuesday. Chasing the daunting total, opener Esha Rohit Oza scored a 36-ball 38 (5x4, 1x6) but UAE never were in the chase as they kept losing wickets at regular intervals.

Pace duo of Renuka Singh (1/30) and Pooja Vastrakar (1/27) dismissed Theertha Satish (4) and Rinitha Rajith (7) as UAE slipped to 24 for 2 in 5.2 overs.

Deepti then struck in her third ball, removing Samaira Dharnidharka (5) but Oza and Kavisha Egodage (40 not out) played some entertaining shots to score 20 runs in next three overs.

Opener Smriti Mandhana (13) blasted a six and a four to give India a good start but an overambitious shot saw her being holed out at mid-off off spinner Egodage in the third over. *—PTI*

NORDEA OPEN FINAL

Italy's Matteo Berrettini winner and France's Quentin Halys pose with their trophies at the end of the men's singles final of the Swiss Open in, Switzerland on Sunday; Portugal's Nuno Borges kisses the trophy after winning the singles final against Spain's Rafael Nadal. He beats Nadal 6-3, 6-2 *PHOTO: PTI*

India's Bhambri wins ATP Tour doubles

GSTAAD, 21 JULY

India's Yuki Bhambri and his French partner Albano Olivett clinched the men's doubles title at the Swiss Open ATP Tour tennis tournament with a hard-fought win over Ugo Humbert and Fabrice Martin in the final here on Sunday.

The pair of Bhambri and Olivett, seeded third in the ATP 250 clay court tournament beat their French opponents 3-6 6-3 10-6 to win the title. The final match lasted one hour and six minutes with both pairs refusing to give an inch to the other before the Indo-French duo of Bhambri and Olivett emerging winner in the end.

This was the third ATP doubles title for the 32-year-old Bhambri and second while partnering with Olivetti. He won his maiden ATP title at the 2023 Mallorca Championships with Lloyd Harris. He won his second title at the BMW Open in April this year with Olivetti.

Bhambri reached the top 50 in the doubles rankings on June 24 and this win will improve his position further. *—PTI*

Yuki Bhambri & Albano Olivetti won the ATP 250 event in Gstaad.
PHOTO: X@SPORTSGRAMINDIA

Aditi lies T-12th, eyes first Top-10 of 2024

SYLVANIA, 21 JULY

Indian golfer Aditi Ashok stayed in sight of her first Top-10 of 2024 as she shot a bogey free 3-under 68 in the third round of the Dana Open golf. to be T-12 here.

With rounds of 67-72 on the first two days, Aditi is now 8-under with one more round to go. Her best results on LPGA this season have been T-17 at Amundi Evian Championships last week and also at the Meijer LPGA Classic. Aditi has had a modest season in 2024, but would like to see some better form ahead of the Olympics in two weeks.

Aditi had three birdies and no bogeys and the birdies came on the eighth, 13th and 15th holes. Thailand's Chanettee Wannasaen added a 5-under 66 to a career-low 36-hole score of 131 for another new career-low with a 54-hole score of 197.

Aditi Ashok
PHOTO: www.aditiashok.com

At Highland Meadows Golf Club on Saturday, she recorded a round of 66 after 66-65 on the first two days.

Wannasaen is coming off her best major championship finish, a T17 result at last week's Amundi Evian Championship. *—PTI*